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THE MINISTER
THE PARENT
AND THE CHURCH

THE MINISTER, THE PARENT, AND THE CHURCH:

Inaugural Addresses

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

ASSEMBLY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND AND WALES.

BY THE

REV. DAVID THOMAS, B.A.,

Chairman,

MINISTER OF HIGHBURY CHAPEL, BRISTOL.

LONDON:
JACKSON, WALFORD, & HODDER.
BRISTOL: W. MACK, 38 PARK STREET.
1866.

100. S. 145.

BIBLIOTHECA · BODLEIANA

CONTENTS.

PAGE

The Minister and the Church: the Inaugural Address delivered before the Annual Assembly of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, at the Weigh-House Chapel, London, May 9, 1865, ... 5

The Parent and the Church; or, the Christian Parent's Responsibility: the Inaugural Address delivered before the Autumnal Assembly of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, at Brunswick Chapel, Bristol, October 24, 1865, ... 65

THE MINISTER AND THE CHURCH:

The Inaugural Address

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND AND WALES,

At the Weigh-House Chapel, May 9, 1865.

THE MINISTER AND THE CHURCH.

My Dear Brethren,

It would, perhaps, hardly be a fitting thing in me to call into question the wisdom of your resolution by which I was invited to undertake the duties which I have now to discharge, but I may be permitted to say, that from the day on which, with much hesitation and self-distrust, I accepted your invitation, I have never ceased to question my own wisdom. I am sensible of the honourable character of this position, and I acknowledge very thankfully the respect and confidence which you have expressed by requesting me to fill it. It is a position, however, which it never entered into my mind to anticipate or covet for myself, the prominence and responsibility of it are by no means congenial with my disposition and habits, and I cannot but be well aware that there are many present who might occupy it, whose names are for good reasons much more widely known than mine, whose services to the Union and to the De-

nomination have been much greater, and whose natural and acquired aptitude for presiding over your deliberations far exceed any that I possess. I say this very unaffectedly, but in the hope it may secure for me even more than your ordinary forbearance.

The addresses delivered on these occasions have been usually received with general and loud commendation. It has been observable, however, of late years, that the admiration which they so deservedly called forth, did not prevent a rather frequent reference to their length. It would seem that they were longer than could have been agreeably or patiently borne but for their great excellence, and that no one may safely imitate their length who is not able to command also the higher qualities by which they were distinguished. As I make no pretension to that ability, it will be wise in me, for my own sake as well as for yours, to aim at a less serious demand on your time and attention than was made by the honoured brethren who have lately preceded me.

There are few gatherings of our countrymen at this time for any public purpose, in which the opportunity is not eagerly embraced for expressing sympathy with the rulers and people of the United States of America in the last and terrible

affliction that has befallen them by the death of their honoured and loved chief magistrate. It is a relief to me to know that I need not occupy your time by attempting to give utterance to your deep feeling upon this subject. Any words I could use would be unequal to that purpose. A resolution will be submitted to you, by adopting which you will better express our sorrow for the great national bereavement which our brethren in America have just suffered, our prayer that God may soon give them to know the blessedness of peace and reconciliation, and our congratulations upon the coming deliverance of their land from the iniquity and woes of slavery.

It will be readily believed how one of my difficulties in the anticipation of this hour would relate to the choice of a subject for this opening address.

The *main elements in the theology of our body*, and *our distinctive ecclesiastical principles and practices* have been so often and with so much fulness and force explained and vindicated before the assembly of this Union, that they have not presented themselves to me under any aspect or relation on which it seemed desirable that I should now dwell.

The *great questions of religious* controversy in

our day, which affect so directly the very foundations of our faith, and in which therefore we have an interest only in common with every other section of the Christian Church, have also received an amount of attention from those who last, and with so much ability, addressed you from this chair, that any lengthened reference to them at this time appeared neither necessary nor expedient.

The *condition of our churches*, too, in *relation to their spiritual life*, occupied so large and prominent a place in our serious thoughts at the last autumnal meeting, that it seemed as though it was not open so soon again to request your attention to it.

After too long an experience of the difficulty thus created, it occurred to me at length, that as the great subject which I have last named must be felt to transcend every other in interest and importance, I might venture, notwithstanding that the recent discussion of it is fresh in our memories, to offer some remarks on one of the many topics which it embraces. And of these topics, the one on which I have concluded I might not unprofitably engage your attention, is *the relation of our ministry, in its public exercises, to the standard of the Christian life commonly attained among us.*

If I were to say, which I am not prepared to do, that the prevailing type of character which is presented by our churches in the present day is, taken altogether, not only different in phase, but inferior in substance, to that which they furnished in the time of our fathers, when they were fewer in number and less zealous in works, I should not expect to carry with me the judgment of this assembly. Still less should I expect, or think I had a right to expect your assent, if I said that it suffered by comparison with that presented by any of the other religious communities in the land. But I feel sure I shall not provoke controversy if I only say that it is not such as we can contemplate without disappointment and solicitude. The reasons for thanksgiving are indeed numerous. Many of our churches are conspicuous as such for their spiritual life and power. The aggregate of worth and work which they present, regarded by itself only, must often awaken our gratitude and admiration. To few of them should we look in vain for individual examples of great moral and spiritual excellence. But it is not less true that in most of them the proportion is very large of those who exhibit but feebly and indecisively the Christian spirit and life. It will not be disputed that a fuller and more general expres-

sion of the Christian character in something of the beauty and strength of its maturity is the common want among us, even as it is confessed by those who are recognised as speaking with authority and the best knowledge, to be the prevailing want in the other Christian communities.

Whilst some are known to us all who have attained the "stature," and the power, and the glory of men in Christ Jesus; and many more who are manifestly advancing towards that ripeness of Christian manhood; we cannot also but know that there are great numbers, more or less closely related to our churches, who give little or no evidence of such advancement. Where the light from heaven has broken in upon the soul, we see the knowledge of Divine things continue ever dim and limited; where the faith and love are genuine, they are weak and unsteady in their action, unequal to any hard service or sacrifice; where spiritual emotions are often at intervals excited, a spiritual tone is wanting to the habit of the mind; where the conscience is awakened, and its authority is acknowledged, it is lacking in delicate sensibility and consistent force; where the outward and habitual action is in general accordance with the law of righteousness, it does not shine with the brightness of

integrity and honour or with the grace of benevolence. They who are of the outside world do not see much to admire, or much to dislike, or to impress them with a character very different from their own. Where there are signs of the Christian life, there are no signs of its development and progress. It does not unfold itself, becoming a beautiful thing to behold. It gives no promise of the maturity which is possible to it in this world.

I am describing what we must all frequently observe,—so frequently, that most will say that low attainment expresses the prevailing character of the religious life of the day—low attainment, not as compared with the Scripture ideal of that life, but as compared with what is proved to be within our reach by many examples of it, and with what might be expected from our privileges and professions, and the grandeur and power of the things that we believe.

Our observation will further bear witness to the very frequent absence of all earnest desire and endeavour after a truer and nobler life than that which is so commonly met. There is often no conviction of any urgent necessity for it. The solicitude is limited too much to the attainment of salvation, and that signifies too exclusively escape from the evils to come, and participation in the

future blessedness. And salvation thus defined depends on the work of Christ, which becomes available through faith in Him. He has answered for all present and future deficiencies, as well as for all past sins; so that there need be no very anxious thought for the evils that remain any more than for the sins that are past and forgiven. Or, where there is a truer conception of Christ's work, and of the office of faith in Him, and an acknowledgment of the necessity,—if not for personal security, for ends that are more sacred,—of a more elevated and purer example of the Christian life, it very frequently happens that it has ceased to be an object of pursuit or aspiration, from a sense of the hopelessness of the attainment of it. However desirable it may seem to be, it is the reward of a labour which it is not possible to expend in the acquisition of it, or it is the product of the Divine Spirit's influence, bestowed in a measure in which there is no expectation of receiving it.

Is it not too commonly the case within the respective spheres of our personal knowledge, that those who are in a comparatively low spiritual condition have little thought of rising in this world into a state much higher, because, with their conception of Christ's work they do not think it imperatively necessary; or, because,

with their conception of the difficulties attending it, and of the limitation set to the Spirit's work, they do not think it practicable? They anticipate that at the last, or as they open their eyes on the world of spirits, a mighty change will be wrought in them, which will meeten them for the heavenly presence and blessedness; but they look for no change in the present life involving any signal improvement of their nature. They are conscious of much in their spirit and habit which is at variance with the law and image of Christ, but they have ceased to hope for deliverance from it in this world. They must continue, for the most part, as they are to end. They know it is a poor example which they give of the Christian character, but they must bear with it. It would often seem as though they had come to regard what is evil in it as an affliction rather than a wrong, and were called to exercise resignation in relation to it rather than repentance. They must be resigned to the evil in themselves, which they cannot hope, in this imperfect state, to escape.

Our judgment will vary with regard to the extent to which this is a true account of the Christian life of the day; but we shall agree that it is true to an extent that makes the inquiry into the actual relation which the public

service of the ministry bears to it, of the greatest concern to this assembly. The ministry is but one of many human agencies designed and employed for the advancement of that life; it has, however, the first place among them, and it holds that precedence chiefly in virtue of its public functions. It was instituted "for the perfecting of the saints," "for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." They who first discharged its functions "preached Christ, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom," that they might "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

When the perfection of our nature, which is thus declared on the highest authority to be the chief end and true aim of the ministry, is acknowledged not to be promoted in a perceptible degree in the instance of a large number of professedly Christian men, it may reasonably be a first and most anxious question with us who are engaged in the public duties of that ministry, whether and how far this may be ascribed to inefficiency in the discharge of those duties. Is it to be almost wholly explained by a reference to the formidable obstructions and agencies that

are counteractive of the influence of the pulpit, and to the imperfect use of other means than those which belong to its sphere, and only in some small degree to the character of its ministrations? Is the work of the pulpit generally so done, that so far as that is concerned, it is matter for reasonable disappointment and surprise that a deeper godliness is not more prevalent, and that examples of pure and noble lives are not multiplied throughout the congregations of the land? This is to be determined according to the judgment sometimes expressed by the answer given to another question, Whether the fundamental verities of the evangelical doctrine, especially as these embrace the Divine greatness of our Lord, the atonement He made for the sin of the world, and the agency of the Holy Spirit in the renewal of man's sinful nature, are taught and urged to their immediate practical issues in repentance and faith with sufficient fulness, and earnestness, and prayerfulness? Where this is done, it is sometimes affirmed or implied that all is done which is indispensable in the service of the pulpit for the growth as well as the quickening of souls; but this is at variance with the facts of experience, and the teaching and example of Christ and the Apostles, and overlooks the obvious distinction between the work

of the minister of a church and that of the missionary or evangelist.

We believe that our ministry is not chargeable with unfaithfulness in the exhibition of the cardinal truths of the gospel; but this leaves wide open the question how far in its public action it may be wanting in adaptedness for the "edification of the Church," the "perfecting of the saints," the building up of the Christian character into nobler forms and proportions than are usually witnessed.

It is a question on which it becomes me to speak with the utmost modesty and caution. I will not, indeed, attempt a definite answer to it. I will do little more than suggest inquiries which I beg may not be understood as intended for so many positive affirmations, but rather only as indicating some at least of the directions in which the answer may probably be found.

And the first inquiry which I would suggest *will be into the service of the ministry in its immediate relations to the devotions of the Church.*

Worship is for our sanctification, not less than for God's glory. The common prayer of the Church is one of the principal means for the purification and elevation of the character of its *members.* How far it answers that purpose

greatly depends, especially with our practice in respect to it, upon the minister. He determines the form, and, in no inconsiderable degree, the spirit, of the public prayer. It rests largely with him whether the communion of the people with God by means of it shall be real or formal, how near they shall come by it to Him, and how much they shall receive of the influence of His presence. There is no duty of his office more solemn, or which involves graver responsibilities, than that which he has to perform in the guidance of their devotions. Some preparation of the understanding, and yet more of the heart, would seem indispensable to the due discharge of it. It may, indeed, be thought that as the prayer is addressed directly to God, it cannot require for its purposes any care like that which is necessary and usually given to what is directly addressed, for some important end, to our fellow-men. But it is then forgotten that here too, whilst the appeal is directly to the Divine mind, an action of the highest kind is intended upon the human mind. For it devolves here on the minister to utter such words, and with such feeling, as shall quicken, and direct, and intensify the devout thoughts and affections by which the congregation approaches God. It surely should not be willingly left to the suggestions, and

experiences, and accidents of the moment to determine what the prayer of a whole assembly shall be. Is it true that it is very often regarded, and not by the undevout only, as quite subordinate in its interest and uses to the sermon? If it be true, how has it come to pass that the joint communion of souls with God is judged and felt to profit them less than the instruction they receive from the lips of man? Can it be that this difference, said to exist in the interest felt in the prayer, and in the advantage derived from it, as compared with the sermon, is in good part owing to a corresponding difference in the care which the minister gives to the one as compared with the other? Is the public prayer generally preceded by so much thought and discipline of the heart as is plainly necessary to adapt it for lifting up those who join in it into sympathy and fellowship with God? It is a question which we could not pass over, and to which we could assign no secondary importance when we would judge of the efficiency of our ministry for the "perfecting of the saints."

If, for our guidance in that judgment, we turn from the prayer to the preaching, I would make bold to ask, *Whether any great improvement of the Christian character, as seen in the common example of it, is generally sought, in the mini-*

strations of the pulpit, with any real expectation of its being attained?

Has the minister faith in the possible saintliness of those whom he serves? He believes in the power of the truth which he dispenses, and in the almighty energy of God's Spirit; but he may also believe that there is something in the condition of the Church at this time which restrains the action in it of that twofold and Divine power, and forbids the hope for the present of a much higher life than it now exhibits. It is not the age, he may think, for saints. The Church, he may hold, is doomed for a while to its present mediocrity of faith and virtue. As he looks upon those whose spiritual training is committed to his care, and notes the imperfections which enfeeble and disfigure their character, he may regard it as hardly possible that any change will be wrought in them which will raise them in this world to any conspicuous excellence. When he dispenses to them the mighty Word intrusted to him, it may be with a secret conviction, that, though it cannot but be of some service to them, they will for the most part retain to the last their moral weaknesses and deformities. It may seem to him that their moral stature and form are well-nigh fixed for this life. His ministry, if such should be the

case, wanting the inspiration of faith and hope, is not likely to be of the kind greatly to promote their Christian development and growth. What is attempted with a faint heart is rarely done well.

Is the instruction of the pulpit sufficiently distinguished by its immediate relation to the circumstances and character of those to whom it is addressed?

The late Dr Arnold, after at one time repeatedly worshipping with Presbyterian congregations in Scotland, complained that the preaching was *ad clerum* rather than *ad populum*. It would appear, that in the examples which uniformly came before him, the exposition of Scripture was too much of the nature of a critical exegesis, and that doctrine and duty were taught more in their relation to a theological system than to the living souls who were addressed. When the preacher meets his own congregation on the day of rest and worship, he is face to face with, it may be, some hundreds of souls whose failures, and weaknesses, and dangers, appeal to him for help. There are only so many minutes that are given to him during which he may minister to their necessities. If he would do this effectually, he has little time to spare *for* what does not bear obviously and directly

on their condition. His sermon should show that he has been studying them not less carefully than the subject of it. It may be *expository;*—its main purpose should be to bring out the meaning of the Divine Word in its relation to them. It may be *doctrinal;*—its great aim should be, not so much to discuss the doctrine as it lies outside their mind—a part of the Christian system of belief—as to bring it home, and deal with it as "spirit and life" in their consciousness. It may be *historical;*—they should be able to see their own nature and ways in the light of the story. It may be *pictorial;*—they should be looking at themselves, by reason of the likeness or contrast in the figures painted. There are occasions when the sermon cannot be pervaded by this directly personal element; but we submit that, in the stated ministrations of the pastor to his people, they are exceptional. It cannot be too much in ordinary cases *to* them and *about* them. The "few words of personal application" at the close of it, when they are at all wanted, should generally but complete an application which could not fail to be recognised in what preceded them. They should very rarely be left to bring home and near what before was remote and foreign. The discourse which is greatly to improve the souls

that hear it, though it may not be personal in form, should be felt to be in substance and in the best sense what all the discourses of the Master were—an intensely personal thing.

When the preaching is marked in some considerable or adequate measure by this direct personal reference, *does it show a due regard to the range and comparative worth of the motives which should determine the character and life?*

Those who hold the evangelical preaching of the day in no favour, affirm that it is not fitted to produce high and noble examples of the Christian life, because of the class of motives of which it chiefly avails itself. Friendly critics have acknowledged, with much abatement and qualification, some reason for that judgment upon it. It urges, they have said, moral and religious duties too much on the ground of law. It lays too great stress upon the advantages, personal and relative, which follow from righteousness and godliness; and, when it appeals to the affections of men, it makes the force of the appeal rest too much on the love which has been shown them. As the complaint is that of friends as well as of adversaries, it may well command our serious attention.

There is a stage in the Christian's course when duty must be urged on the ground of law,

but it is the lowest stage in it. If he is to rise above the condition of mere spiritual childhood, he must be taught to feel a higher impulse to righteousness than that of the constraint of law. In every stage of his course, he needs be quickened and sustained by the consideration of what he may gain or lose. To make light of the preacher's appeals to his hopes and fears, is to reflect on the Divine example, and to disparage or overlook the constitution of our nature. It probably, however, is not sufficiently remembered that true righteousness is never practised merely as the best policy, that a Christian character can never have for its chief basis a calculation of profit and loss in this world or the next. It is not by addressing ourselves mainly to men's interests that we shall ever elevate their nature and ennoble their lives. They need be moved by the far nobler consideration of the love of God, and pre-eminently of the love of God in Christ. We can never apply this too much as a motive power over the affections. But may it not be urged too exclusively? Have we not sometimes known it treated as though it stood well-nigh alone as the motive of Christian obedience, and the moral instrument of sanctification? Mighty as it is for that end—mightiest of all forces, as it has proved itself to be, in

subduing hard and alienated hearts into love and submission to God—we cannot for that reason rightly or safely dispense with, or refuse their high place to those other motives, whose strength does not depend on personal considerations. Our gratitude to God does not become piety until we are moved also by a sense of the moral glory of His own nature. True love to God must have a root in our moral nature, and must include in it the love of righteousness and the love of God as the impersonation of righteousness. Is the moral nature of man duly considered? Does he hear enough of the claims of righteousness and of God's own character, as well as of what God has done for him, and what is best for his own interests? When he is summoned by the voice from the pulpit to obedience, is it sufficiently often because obedience is right and because of what God is, as well as because he has himself been so greatly loved and obedience is infinitely expedient? It will scarcely be maintained, at least in its application to Christian men, that such an appeal will have comparatively little force in it, and may therefore well be employed sparingly. Are they not born of God? Is not the Spirit of God in them? Are they not partakers of the Divine nature? It will surely not be of small avail to appeal to

their love of what is right, as well as to their love of what is useful, to their love of God for the transcendant glory of His own nature, as well as to their love of Him for His gifts to them. They who have risen to distinction in the Christian life are moved more by the love of righteousness than the desire of happiness. They esteem it more to be like Christ, than even to receive from Him. God himself is greater and better in their eyes than His gifts. And the ministry of Christ's Word most fitted to beautify and glorify with His own image the character of His disciples, will not place the attraction of happiness before the power of righteousness—the service which Christ renders before Christ himself—what is to be got from God before God himself.

Does the preaching of our day accompany the appeals by which it moves the conscience and affections with the guidance which is further necessary for the formation and growth of the Christian character?

"We believe," says a living and popular writer, who has dealt with no little success with the subject of practical religion, "that the office of the ministry being twofold—to rouse consciences and to guide them—we have for a long time past in the National Church (and probably it is

the same with the sects) contented ourselves with rousing, while we have done scarcely anything to guide them. The one object of all our teaching, whether in formal sermons or in books, has been to make impressions, not to give them a right direction when made."

An eminent prelate, who, it may be assumed, is well acquainted with the kind of preaching prevalent among the several theological schools in his own Church, after speaking in a recent charge to his clergy of the foundation of character being well and truly laid by the teaching of the Christian faith, proceeds to ask:—"But where is the superstructure? Where is the building up? Who supplies the strong meat after the milk? Who disciplines and guides the awakened conscience? Who enters into the detail of Christian duty? Who teaches to observe all things which the Lord Jesus has commanded?"

There may not be among us (we believe there is not) a reason for lamentation to the extent that this language expresses. But can we say there is no reason for it? Is there not with us also too much left to the spontaneous action of the awakened conscience and quickened affections for the production of practical righteousness?

Does our ministry generally *give the guidance that is needed, by treating with sufficient frequency, and fulness, and explicitness, of the moral dispositions and habits which are of the essence of the holy character and life?*

A morality that had little relation to Christ was once taught, and we know with what poor results. Are we quite sure that this has been followed by a sufficiently full exposition and inculcation of the morality that is founded upon Christ? It is not a question at all whether the Christian virtues and duties are preached in our pulpits, but whether they are preached with that distinctness and amplitude of detail which the wants of our congregations demand.

Love to man is ever inculcated in our public instruction; but of those who hear and assent, how many are there who give place to envy, jealousy, wrath, a selfish disregard to the feelings, reputation, or circumstances of their neighbours? Do they hear much of these things, as well as of the general obligation to Christian charity and brotherly love? Is enough said of envy, jealousy, and the kindred passions of our fallen nature? Are they not evils too common and serious to be denounced only inferentially, or condemned only in brief, passing references to them? Do they not constitute sufficiently great

and solemn subjects for separate and enlarged discourse? Should not those who indulge in them, and who gather round our pulpits to receive the message of salvation, hear it frequently, and with prolonged emphasis, declared that these are their sins, for which Christ died, from which they must be saved, if they are really saved at all, and from which salvation through Him is now offered them?

Humility may be often enough enjoined, but is that cardinal Christian virtue so explained in the varied practical manifestations of it, that the pride of family, and the pride of money, and the pride of personal endowment, which everywhere abound, are laid bare to the eyes of the congregation, and especially to the consciences of the guilty?

Who shall be greatest? Is that hankering, and scheming, and undue striving after prominence and power, to which our nature is so prone, and which is the parent of so much that is ignoble and mischievous in the individual character, in the family, in the Church, and in every other sphere of social life and action, so great an evil to our minds as it was in our Divine Master's judgment? Is it, when we would teach and enforce humility, treated with the same *specialty* and solemnity as it was in His dis-

courses? It will not be said that the conscience of His disciples needs less to be instructed in relation to it now than it did when He set the little child in the midst of them, or when He washed their feet.

Zeal for the truth is urged, and with especial earnestness in this time of controversy. May there not be much zeal for truth, as it is believed to be, where there has been little thought, and solicitude, and labour spent in ascertaining what the truth really is? Is much said of the exercise of conscience in the formation and expression of religious beliefs, without which the zeal that may be kindled will have little or no moral worth in it?

No intelligent Christian will speak of preaching Christ as though it was something different from much instruction like this in the separate elements and forms of Christian virtue and duty.

Christ is not fully preached where anything that enters essentially into His doctrine and example are not fully taught. They who hear a great deal and delight to hear of what Christ has wrought for them, and who are familiar with exhortations in general terms to a holy life, but who hear little of the particular forms which the evil takes in their own tempers, and passions,

and speeches, and habits,—very little of the particular aspect of the general duty in which they are apt to neglect it,—have good reason for complaining and lamenting that Christ is not more fully, and that is, truly, preached to them.

It may be further asked whether in the public instruction of the ministry the *direction usually given for the use of the great and recognised means of spiritual improvement is as distinct and ample as the necessities of those who hear require?*

They are rightly directed (to give some examples of what we mean) to "look to Christ," to "depend upon Christ," to "abide in Christ," as the primary condition of Christian progress. Now it cannot be doubted (or, if any one doubt, he may satisfy himself of it by a little personal inquiry) that in the minds of many who hear this language there is but a dim and vague sense of its meaning. They cannot exactly tell what the relation is which they are required by it to maintain towards Christ. It is as certain that others think that what it signifies is, that they should simply trust to Christ for the sanctification and perfection of their character. Does it not appear as though the teaching which they have received upon this most vital question must have been wanting in explicitness? When they

were told to "look to Christ," to "depend on Him," to "abide in Him," could it have been at the same time clearly taught them that this means not only confidence in the power and purpose of Christ, but also the practical surrender of themselves in their habitual life to the influence of His doctrine, and life, and spirit?

Among the means of spiritual improvement, a prominent place is given to the perusal and study of the Scriptures. Where the Book of God is neglected we do not expect the life of God to thrive in the soul. It must be, therefore, with much concern that we hear it so often expressed in these days, at one time as a fear, at another time as a conviction, that the Holy Book is less read than it was by the devout in the past generation. We are quite certain that it is not read and studied as much as is necessary for the vigour and growth of the spiritual life. This cannot be because enough is not said in our pulpits in praise of the Bible, or that the perusal of it and the inquiry into its meaning are not frequently enough urged. Can it be in some measure owing to insufficient guidance in the true way of dealing with it? Does the minister generally inquire into, and elucidate the meaning of the Bible in a way at once to stimulate and direct the subsequent and habitual in-

quiries of his hearers? Are the examples of exposition given in our pulpits sufficiently numerous, and of a kind to quicken their desire to know, and guide their search into, its meaning? Is the prevailing method of public instruction calculated to multiply Bible readers and Bible students in our churches?

For the increase of the spiritual life in those to whom it has been imparted, and the greater conformity of their character to the Divine example, they are directed ever to pray for the Spirit, on whose presence and power that life in the soul and progress in the character depend. Those who are thus directed are often sensible that they pray in vain for that Spirit, while they have a very imperfect apprehension of any other reason for their not receiving what they ask for than that it does not please God to give it. But when it does not please God to give His Spirit, it must be because the conditions on which He has promised to bestow it, in answer to their prayer, are not fulfilled. Those conditions may be known, otherwise there could be no responsibility in relation to them. How is it that those whose prayer for the Spirit is not answered, often do not know what the conditions are which they have not fulfilled? Were they instructed in them? Was it made clear

to them as it might have been, and as it required to be, when they were directed to pray, what was to be their sense of need, and the strength of their desire, and the relation of their will to God's will, and of their practice to God's precept? Or, if they were instructed in the conditions of efficacious prayer, were they also taught the hindrances and helps of a general kind, and those special in their case, to the fulfilment of those conditions?

Work is prescribed as one of the most effectual means of personal improvement. It is maintained, and truly, to be indispensable to the health and growth of the soul. The noblest examples of the Christian life are found among the earnest workers. It is not true, however, as the language sometimes used upon the subject would imply, that if abundant work is committed to the Christian convert's hands, his spiritual safety and progress are all but ensured. Christian activity and labour will not suffice for this. The active and laborious Christian is sometimes seen to decline in the life and power of the Spirit. His character does not always become more pleasant and edifying to behold as his work advances. He does not, the more he gives and labours, always become more meek, and humble, and tractable, and self-forgetful, and

spiritual. The religious work may be done in an irreligious spirit. With that stirring summons to work, which so often, but not too often, falls upon the ears of our congregations, and that assurance that without work no progress can be made towards the higher state of the Christian life, is it made sufficiently intelligible and impressive, how the work must be done, with what aim, in what spirit, and in what association with inward and spiritual exercises, if that great end is to be served by it? Do the busy Christian workers hear quite enough of the inner life, and of the conditions on which their outward activity can minister to the advancement of the Divine work in their own nature?

It is oftener said now than it used to be, that a man's daily occupation in the outward world, instead of being of necessity adverse to his spiritual improvement, is among the Divine appointments for the promotion of it. Many a Christian when he hears this, and thinks of his association and experiences in his worldly calling, is perplexed to know how it may become in any sense a means of grace to him. Is he taught the mode, as well as assured of the fact? Does he find that the moral questions and difficulties which beset and perplex him in his daily pursuits are appreciated and fairly dealt with by his

religious teacher? Does he learn from him, on the Sunday, with definiteness enough for his guidance, how he is to make the cares, and toils, and temptations, and pleasures, and perils of his occupation through the week, subservient to his spiritual progress?

They to whom our ministry is addressed are told that God, by His providence in the events of every day's observation and experience, is seeking their instruction and improvement as truly as in the events recorded in Scripture; and that His Spirit as certainly dwells in them for their enlightenment and guidance as He did in those whom He influenced for the higher end of inspiration. If they need the help of that ministry to direct them to the meaning and right use of God's messages to them in the events of the Scripture record, they must need it not less for the understanding and true use of His communications to them in the events of their daily life. If they require the Christian teacher to interpret the voice of the Spirit in the Divine Word, they must need it also to understand and profit by that same Spirit's voice in their inward experiences. Does he study much their need in this respect? Are his directions for their progress in the Divine life and image, through the lessons and influences of God's daily providence

without, and God's Spirit continually within them, as full and specific as they might and need be?

We might point to the same obvious necessity for special guidance in the use of other means of Christian progress. There is a limit to the special direction, as well as to the details of Christian duties, which it is possible or expedient to give from the pulpit; but is that limit approached, or nearly approached in its ordinary ministrations? Or, is there too much truth in the judgment we have already quoted, that the ministry of the day does a great deal to rouse consciences, but very little to guide them,—that its object is to make impressions, not much to give them a right direction when made?

I must disavow again the purpose of affirming that there is in our pulpit ministrations generally a want of adaptedness for the building up of high Christian character to the extent that answers at once unfavourable and unqualified to the questions I have put would involve. I would only observe that I think it will assist us to the knowledge of what may be wanting in it for that end, if we follow the lines of inquiry which I have ventured to indicate. Or, if some, with such assistance as this might give, would still hesitate, on account of the limited range of

individual observation, to pass any judgment on the general character of our ministry, it may at least help each one among us to judge of his own ministrations, whether they are calculated to instruct as well as to impress, to raise the superstructure of pure and noble characters on the foundation which he lays of repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are many things which operate unfavourably to the prevalence of such a ministration, to some of which I propose to direct my remaining remarks. One of them is found in the *demand for strong emotional excitement which characterises our day.* It is the common and just complaint that, greatly to attract and please, there must be now the power strongly to excite. It is the sensational that is sure to be popular. The theatres and lecture-rooms fill, when they promise the audience what is strange and startling. The books will sell largely, which contain powerful stimulants to the emotions. There is a craving at the heart of society for excitement. It is felt in our congregations. Those who form them would hear what is novel and stirring. The sensational preacher draws the crowd. But the preaching that aims, and with any prospect of success, at edification, "the perfecting of the

saints," will rarely be of a kind to create a sensation. There are, indeed, men among us, whom we all honour and prize, and who so unite to an imaginative or deeply-passionate nature the gift of eloquent speech, that, whatever be their theme or immediate aim, they are able to move to some pitch of intensity the feelings of those who hear them. Even they, however, find this least to be done when they would guide the consciences they have awakened, and instruct in the ways and means of spiritual improvement. In the case of the many, who do not share in their special endowments, it will then hardly be done at all. Preaching to instruct, and so to raise the spirit and form of the habitual life, they will seldom stir up strong emotions.

But that excitement of feeling is what is most desired. Hence the temptation, in the choice of topics, and in the method of their treatment, to disregard that which is good for the use of edifying, for the sake of that which is serviceable for the purpose of pleasing; to consider first what will strike, not what will profit; what will make a sensation, not what will build up the character.

It is not the preacher's duty or wisdom to be indifferent to the popular taste or passion for excitement, but to adapt himself to it as far as

this may serve the ends of his ministry. The danger is, lest he should miss those ends in the endeavour to gratify it. It should be his care to remember, what he well enough knows, that he is sent, not to please, but to instruct—not to preach sermons which men can enjoy because they pleasantly break the monotony of their habitual experience, but to preach sermons which they often ought not to be able to enjoy, for the reason that their aim and tendency are to make them better.

It was the highest encomium that Louis XIV. bestowed on Massillon when he said, "Father, I have heard many great orators in this chapel. I have been highly pleased with them; but as for you, whenever I hear you, I go away displeased with myself."

It is an evil sign when the congregation disperses with satisfaction on every face and praise on every tongue. It was not thus with the assemblies which our Lord addressed when they withdrew from His presence. He who serves Him in the gospel need consider and lay it to heart for his guidance, and often for his consolation and encouragement, how much nobler a thing it is to be a teacher than an entertainer, a healer of men's souls than a dispenser of pleasant stimulants; how unspeakably better to lead

a few some steps on towards the perfection of their nature, than only to attract and gratify the multitude ; how poor a thing it is to excite the wonder of a crowd, and thrill it with the emotion of a passing hour, compared with the training of a single soul for the service and blessedness of eternity.

2. *The impatience of slow action and delay which marks the times in which we live* is unfavourable to the ministry which seeks the progress and maturity of Christian character. Men cannct now endure the slow paces at which their fathers were satisfied to move. The speed with which they travel has become in common speech a symbol of the quickened movement of their general life. They must gain knowledge and become wise swiftly or not at all. They are more in haste than ever to be rich. Study and business must yield quick returns. Hours must suffice for what used to be the work of days. Months must yield the fruit which used to be gathered from years. They cannot work and wait as in former times. And this spirit of impatience, like every other spirit in the world, has entered the Church. The results of Christian labour must be achieved quickly. There is no good done, it is often thought, if it is not done at once. The seed that is sown has perished if

the fruit does not appear in a day. There must be here, too, speedy returns for the outlay made. We are indisposed to labour, and watch, and wait. But it is on that condition we must labour if we would attain the highest results of the ministry in the Christian character. Growth is here, as elsewhere, silent, slow, imperceptible in its progress, remote in its completion. The seed we sow will be hidden for a while; we must wait and be content to see the blade first, after that the ear, and then, after much waiting, the full corn in the ear. The laws of growth will not yield to our impatience. It is difficult, but necessary, to resist and conquer this spirit of our times, which would tempt us to spare ourselves the spiritual toil whose rewards are distant, for the sake of that which pays quickly. The husbandman now, as in the old and slow times, "waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receives the early and latter rain." The spiritual husbandman, who cultivates a soil that will yield the precious fruit of heaven, may also be expected even in this busy and hasting age to labour and wait, and have long patience.

The true artist is not moved in the execution of his work by the haste and rush of the world around him. There are no immediate results to

the labour of his thought and hand. He has no quick returns. But "he possesses his soul in patience." He is content to work and wait through the months and years, borne up by the hope that he will succeed at last in giving body, and form, and colour to the vision of beauty that has risen before his mind. They who are engaged in the more glorious work of restoring the likeness of God on the souls of men, of reconstructing from their nature in its ruins a building for the habitation of God, may be justly expected to show even more than the artist's patience in toiling, and watching, and waiting. It is least of all for them to yield to the spirit of these days which cannot bear slow movement or delay. When the end of their ministry is attained at last—when the beauty of God shines with undimmed radiance in the faces of those on whom they have wrought—when the character which they have helped to found and raise is seen at last, complete in all its details and proportions, built up for eternity, the patience of labour demanded of them will seem little enough and the delays short enough for the achievement of so transcendently glorious a result.

3. *The judgment which rather extensively prevails, and which subordinates all other purposes*

of the ministry to that of the conversion of the ungodly, cannot but exert an influence discouraging to the preaching which aims at spiritual edification.

It is chiefly by the number of conversions announced that it is sought to determine the reality and extent of revivals of religion. Some of our large religious bodies formally report their progress by the publication of the additions annually made to their numbers. Very commonly in our own churches the evidence of their prosperity is given in the figures which are believed to represent the number of converted persons added to them. It may be said that this is done of necessity, and that only such changes as are involved in spiritual conversions, and as are usually attended with new relations to the church, can be reported definitely and statistically. This is in great part true. And we mention what is done, not to object to it, but only to observe that the tendency of this frequent presentation of the statistics of conversion, as the one great evidence of religious revival or progress, is to give in the popular judgment and feeling, a place of secondary importance to that growth of character which cannot be reported or recorded in figures. Is it not a secondary place that is often expressly assigned to it among the

purposes of the Christian ministry? Do we not frequently hear the end of it stated to be to "convert men," to "win souls for Christ," as though any service it was to render those who were "converted" and "won," was of quite subordinate consideration? This is sometimes expressly maintained. "The saving of souls," says a writer of considerable influence in our Nonconformist churches, "is of far more importance than the care of converts; and the attaining of this end would amply compensate for any supposable inferiority of pastoral care." Such a sentiment must act prejudicially on the zeal and earnestness of the ministry that aims at Christian edification. Something else is of far more importance! Then the endeavour after this may be restrained and moderated. But, if we call again to mind how "the perfecting of the saints," "the presentation of every man perfect," is declared in the Divine Word to be the end of the institution of the Christian ministry, and how the Master Himself and His Apostles laboured for this, we shall be slow to admit that anything else is of far more importance, or to give this but a secondary place in our aims.

And there are other considerations by which this is forbidden. To the converted themselves

nothing can be of so great importance as their conversion; but can nothing be of as great importance to the world? What, in respect to Christ's kingdom in the world, and, therefore, to the spiritual interests of mankind at large, is the great want of our day? To hasten the triumph of Christ's truth in its conflict with the scepticism and ritualistic superstition and worldliness of the age, what is it that is most required? Not so much an increase in the numbers of those who have faith in it, as clearer evidence in their life of the power and worth of their faith. Twelve men went forth at the beginning of the gospel, and waged war on its behalf against the falsehood and unrighteousness of the world; and they overcame. We have now a vast army on the same side; if it is weak, it cannot be in its numbers; it must be in its material. We need for the conflict with Christ's adversaries, which is growing hotter every day, not so much more, as better, soldiers. To double by so many conversions the number in our churches would, of itself, add less to our strength than it would if those we now count in them were inspired by a great faith, and quickened to the true life.

If we look from that warfare in its general aspect, which the Church wages with the unbelief, and error, and iniquity of the world, to

its special work in the conversion of individuals, we see equal reason for not giving any inferior place, among the aims of the ministry, to the improvement of Christian character. The fewness of the conversions, in many a congregation, is ascribed to the preaching of the pastor, when it might with more justice be ascribed to the life of the church. His words are hindered by the deeds of those who profess to believe them. The unconverted do not believe and obey what they hear one day in the week, because of what they hear and see all the other days. Where the gospel of Christ is preached, this is the greatest of all external hindrances to its success in the conversion of men, as a life in the church that by its spirituality, and purity, and love illustrated its worth, would be the most powerful auxiliary to that success. He who would preach to convert, may well look with supreme concern, and labour with all his might, for a holier life in those already converted.

Nor is it in its direct relation to the preacher's success, that the life which a Christian lives exerts its most important influence on the conversion of men. It has its own sphere, where it acts independently for this end.

The training-up of the children of a household in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,

which, when it is done effectually, involves that change in the tendencies of their moral nature, which is the essence of true conversion, is committed to the parental care. Their salvation depends on their parents' instruction and character as it does on no other human agency. The ministry that would reach and save the ten thousand children in our churches must not give a second place in its care to the character of their parents.

And far beyond this home-sphere may the influence of every Christian extend in the conversion of men.

Who doubts but that such a revival of religion as would show itself in the Christ-like life of those who compose our churches, would be followed by the conversion of the ungodly in numbers not easily reckoned? We desire greater power in the preacher's arguments and appeals to the unconverted, but we should accomplish more by the argument and appeal of a holier and nobler life in the church. No one contributes more truly, no one, it may some day appear, more largely, to the conversion of men than he whose services contribute to the holiness and nobleness of that life. He may be able to reckon but few converts as the fruit of his labour; it may humble and grieve him to think

that they should be so very few; let him be comforted; the number is greater than he knows, of those whose conversion is associated with his name in the records of heaven. It is furthest from our purpose to imply that the importance of conversion, as the immediate aim of our ministry, is over-estimated. Considered by itself, such an over-estimate is impossible. We are only anxious to maintain, that, unspeakably great and solemn as that aim is, it is an error, and a pernicious one, which assigns a place inferior to it, to the building up of the Christian character.

4. *The qualifications and labours which it requires are unfavourable to the prevalence of a ministry that is greatly fitted to promote the growth and perfection of the Christian life.* To conduct to its spiritual advantage, and with no aid from a liturgical service, the stated devotions of a congregation of average intelligence, presupposes a command of thought and expression, which no one of low capacity and little culture can be expected to furnish. While to preach so that it shall be the fault of those who hear, if they are not ever growing in knowledge and goodness, requires a combination of qualifications scarcely, if at all, surpassed by the ordinary demand of any other human work. What study is required of him, who would succeed in any considerable

measure, in leading upwards to the perfection of Christ, that community of souls committed for that purpose to his charge! What knowledge, as the fruit of that study, should he possess of God's Word and Providence, of man's nature and condition, of the special character and circumstances of those whom he instructs, of the obstructions and aids to their progress in their external relations, of their inward difficulties and trials! What wisdom and skill are needed in the application of that knowledge! What firmness and yet what gentleness, and delicacy, and tenderness in his treatment of the feeble life which is to become strong under his care,—of the babes whom he is to train to Christian manhood! What labour must the weekly discourses, which are intended and adapted for that purpose of his office, require! It is this demand which it makes for high and varied qualifications and laborious action that, more than anything else we have named, renders it difficult to provide for the church the ministry that is adapted, in any conspicuous degree, for its edification.—This demand suggests some considerations of much practical importance.

It points to the order of preparatory training to be desired for the work of the ministry. To preach the gospel, understanding only by

that the declaration and enforcement of Christian truth and duty in their elementary and general forms, is what may be done very successfully, under some conditions, where there has been little education of the faculties for that work; but we cannot reflect on what is involved in the spiritual care of a congregation of believers, in a sustained communication to them week after week, throughout successive years, of such light and influence as shall be adapted to their continuous growth in the image of their Lord, without feeling that, to the preparatory training for such a work there is scarcely any limit to be set, short of that imposed by the resources of our churches.

The necessity for the consecration to it of the minister's powers is not less obviously suggested by the demand of the ministry that would greatly serve the edification of the Church. The pulpit has been sometimes spoken of, as though it did not furnish an adequate sphere for the exercise of the highest talents and acquisitions. Some have not entered it, some have withdrawn from it, for this reason. Not a few committed to its duties think it incumbent on them in justice to themselves, and for the full employment of the gifts which God has bestowed upon them, to associate with those duties others not

immediately, sometimes not remotely, connected with them. And examples may be easily found of the efficient discharge of the duties of the pulpit, in conjunction with stated performance of other and extraneous work.

In the case, however, of the vast majority—of nearly all who statedly minister to our congregations—it will not be maintained that that ministry does not suffice for the one great business of their life. They will need other work beside that which it provides, for the advantage of the relief and reinvigoration of change; not because that is not sufficient to occupy them, or worthy wholly to occupy them. The one end of their ministry with which we are now concerned precludes that plea. To preach so that those who twice or thrice every week assemble to hear them, with their diverse characters, experiences, circumstances, and wants, shall be growing in knowledge and wisdom and all goodness, be led onward step by step, under the guidance and influence of the thoughts they utter, towards the heavenly perfection, would surely seem to be work enough for them—worthy of all the time which they can devote to it—difficult enough to tax every power they possess—great and glorious enough in its results to satisfy any ambition they may feel.

It is not a mind in great part exhausted by other occupations that should be given to it. It is not, after a hasty or scanty preparation for it, that it should ever be willingly attempted. They are not a few anxious hours, on the last day or two of a week, whose previous days have been engrossed with other objects and engagements, that should include all the preparation for it. It is not after hurried thoughts, and under a pressure, and with powers half exhausted, that men willingly put their hands to any other work of great difficulty, and delicacy, and importance. It is not thus that the painter approaches the canvas on which he would fix a perishable image of some form of sensible or ideal beauty. It is not thus that the preacher should approach the souls on whom he is to impress the likeness of their Maker and Saviour. It is not thus that he will achieve success of any kind, least of all in this the loftiest of his aims.

When the late Mr Theodore Parker, whose example of devotion to his life's work may be admired where there is no sympathy with his system of religious thought, was smitten with his last illness, he wrote to his congregation from the island in the tropical seas, whither he had gone in the vain search after lost health, in these

words:—"Sermons are never out of my mind, and when sickness brings on me the consciousness that I have nought to do—its most painful part—still all things will take this form, and the gorgeous vegetation of the tropics, their fiery skies, so brilliant all the day, and star-lit, too, with such exceeding beauty all the night,—the glittering fishes in the market,—the silent pelicans,—the strange, fantastic trees,—the ducks rejoicing in the long-expected rain,—all these common things," he says, after a further enumeration, "turn into poetry as I look on, or am compelled to hear, and then transfigure into sermons which come almost spontaneously by night and give themselves to me, and even in my sleep say they are meant for you." Does this language express a needless devotion, especially in a man of great power, to the work of pulpit instruction? Is it too much to expect that we, whom Christ has put into the ministry, should be thus haunted by the image of the souls that He has committed to our care? Has it been really devolved upon us, and in no small degree by the sermons we preach, to assist those souls in the fulfilment of their destiny in this life, and in their education for eternity? And can any time, or knowledge, or study that we can command be more than we should give to that work, so

arduous in its nature, so glorious in its progress, so awful in its responsibility?

It may be urged that the objects which claim our attention and active care have so multiplied in the present day, as to render such devotion to the duties of the pulpit as we plead for scarcely practicable. But are the objects numerous?—must they not be *very few*, which have a claim upon us so strong as absolutely to justify before God and our conscience what we may know and feel to be inadequate preparation for the instruction of those committed to our spiritual guidance and training?

Some will complain and blame if we so devote ourselves to that preparation as to have less time and power for other occupations than the popular judgment has been accustomed to require. They may ascribe it to lack of zeal, and aversion to labour, not knowing that to most of us there is no trial of our zeal so severe, and no labour half so hard, as the labour of thought involved in the due preparation for our public service. It is better that we should bear the blame, until those who cast it upon us come to know what is our chief and distinctive work, and learn to appreciate its difficulties and magnitude; better bear the blame, than escape it by withholding from that work our supreme care.

When we claim this devotion to the service of the pulpit, we do not forget the subordination of our teaching to the agency of the Holy Spirit. We remember that He can make the poorest thoughts and the feeblest words that follow from unworthy preparation, mighty means for the improvement of those to whom we speak. But we remember, too, that it is not according to His promise, or the example of His procedure, thus to encourage our unfaithfulness. It is when we do our part, that we may expect He will do His part. When we do our best, God does the most.

I have spoken only of the qualifications and preparations of a mental kind that are demanded of the ministry that is adapted for Christian edification; the moral qualifications it requires tend not less to limit the extent to which that ministry is found to prevail.

How much spiritual feeling is presupposed in the fitting expression and guidance by free prayer of the devotions of the congregation! Of all public utterances there are none more painful to contemplate, or more impotent for good, than those of the unspiritual man, when he undertakes to pray in the name of an assembly of worshippers. If he is true, and expresses only what is in him, it will be to repress and not

inspire devotion. If he is false, and affects what he does not feel, it will only be with such poor and transient results as must always attend insincerity and pretence in holy services. Better the restriction of a liturgy than the freedom of his speech. The free prayer of the unspiritual is not a thing to be tolerated. It is only he whose spirituality has become deep-toned that we can reasonably expect, by his prayer in the name of the church, to contribute much to its devotions and general edification.

The teaching that is to be greatly effectual for that end makes the same demand upon the character of the teacher. He will not plead with much success for a nobler life than that which he himself is seen to live. Eloquent praise of what those who hear know he does not practise will not deeply move them. And it is not only that the power of his example is required to give force to his inculcation of a pure and lofty life, but it is only when he has himself attained that life that he knows how rightly to direct others in the attainment of it. The ways in which souls travel upward to God are not learned by books and study. He only knows them, and can guide others in them, who has himself trodden them.

Even if he had all the knowledge necessary

for direction, he could not teach, so that those who learned from him would be likely to rise to a higher moral and religious life than he had himself reached; for their progress would depend upon the spirit that his words would breathe, not less than upon their literal signification to their understanding. And it is only as the Divine life is strong in himself, that he can hope to communicate through his teaching the spirit that will be quickening and invigorating to that life in others.

This high moral condition of the preacher's own heart and life, required even more in the ministry that would build up the Christian character, than in that which aims at the conversion of the disobedient, will be recognised at once as one of the chief things operating unfavourably to the prevalence of it. Some would say that the life of the minister, in its principles, and experiences, and outward aspects, cannot be expected to surpass the average life of the Church. He has, besides the trials to his character that are common to all, some that are peculiar to his office. He is spiritually, too, the product of the Church, which cannot but impress upon him its own image. Moreover, he is ever breathing the atmosphere which it creates, subject ever to its assimilating influence. His life,

it is concluded, cannot be otherwise than just an expression of the life of the Church. "Like people, like priest." But this is not a conclusion in which it would be right or safe for us who serve in the ministry to rest.

There may have been sometimes a moral superiority expected from us exceeding what a knowledge of all the circumstances of our position would warrant; but it is not unreasonable to expect in us a greater sanctity of character than is met in the general life of the Church.

The priest should not be altogether like the people. Undertaking the spiritual guidance of others, it seems a just requirement that we should be more spiritual than those whom he would lead.—Burdened with a heavier responsibility than others, it may be inferred that the Divine Master, who gives strength to His servants according to their day, has provided for the supply to us of a larger measure of His Spirit than to others.—There are more prayers offered for us than for others. Our names are oftener mentioned to God in the intercessions of the Church. It is reasonable to look for more in us of that Spirit's presence which is given in answer and in proportion to the prayer for it. —So many are dependent on us for what their spiritual condition shall be—so many souls lose

or gain through their relation to us—are near or far from God according as we are near or far from Him—that it might be fairly inferred we should be actuated by a sense of responsibility which would express itself in a closer walk with God than others are commonly seen to maintain. —Our life's calling consists largely in the study and meditation of the things that are invisible and eternal. The occupations of those to whom we minister mostly relate to the things that are seen and temporal; and, when not necessarily engrossed with these, they are apt to forget the great objects of faith. But we cannot forget them if we would. In the hours of the day when their minds expend their force on purely earthly and transitory interests, our thoughts are of God and Christ, of human life in its highest relations, of judgment, of eternity. We may lose the profit of this through a mere professional attention to them. It is, notwithstanding, a high advantage we enjoy, from which corresponding fruit, in the greater holiness of our characters, should be seen, that we cannot but be thus occupied with the holy and sanctifying realities of the spiritual world.

The service of a more private nature, which we are required to render, especially to those who receive our public instructions, is in many

of its forms fitted to raise our character above the prevailing example of piety and virtue in the Church. We have intimate communion with them, when they pass through those circumstances and experiences which are most fruitful in lessons of heavenly wisdom to us and to them. They invoke our sympathy on those occasions in their history when we cannot well give it without advantage to our own souls. We know more than their neighbours of their cares and sorrows. We enter their houses when they are humbled and chastened by worldly reverses. We listen to their griefs, and see how God deals with them in the hour of sore bereavements. We kneel by their sick-beds and by their death-beds. How often, where the pastorate has extended over some years, has our fellowship been with the departing spirit! how often have we stood by the grave!

This intercourse with our fellow-men, when the hand of God is most visibly upon them, and the Spirit of God is most actively revealed within them; this visitation of their homes when God's presence and agency are most distinctly realised in them; this communion with the sorrowing and the sick, and the dying and the dead, should leave behind it an abiding impression on our spirit and habits.

It should not be "like people, like priest." The priest should not be as the people, but wiser and holier. My brethren, we ought to be better than other men—"ensamples to the flock." Those whom we serve expect to see in us a brighter illustration than they see elsewhere of the truth and value of the doctrine we preach. They look to us for a higher life than their own, and they have a right to look. And it is when they do not look in vain that we may have confidence in their progress towards the "perfection of the saints," through the influence of our ministrations.

I choose to close abruptly rather than farther encroach on your time. I have exceeded the limit which I had proposed to myself. I feel that while I have appeared to arrogate to myself a competency to teach, I ought rather to have been a learner. I ask you, too, to forgive me if I have spoken in a tone that seemed too condemnatory. I can assure you that most of what I have ventured to indicate as defective, has been suggested mainly by the knowledge of what I have been and done myself. It is probable that we all sometimes feel, when we have our duties and responsibilities, and the manner in which we have discharged them, set before us in detail, and we are judged of man, that we had

rather have our case disposed of before the Divine than before a human tribunal. We would prefer the judgment of the merciful God, to the judgment of our brethren. "Let me fall into the hands of the Lord; let me not fall into the hands of men." Conscious of our love to Him, and of a predominating purpose to serve Him, notwithstanding our manifold failings and faults, we may assure ourselves that we shall "find mercy of the Lord in that day." Only let not our faith in His forgiveness induce any tolerance of our imperfections in His glorious service. Rather let our confidence in the mercifulness of the Master's judgment inspire us anew with the purpose to give Him of our very best. May we now feel that we stand in His presence! May we begin, carry on, and finish our work at this time as in His presence, and to the glory of His name!

THE PARENT AND THE CHURCH;

OR, THE

CHRISTIAN PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITY:

The Inaugural Address

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

AUTUMNAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND AND WALES,

At Brunswick Chapel, Bristol, October 24, 1865.

THE PARENT AND THE CHURCH.

My Dear Brethren,

I resume the more active duties of this office which you have requested me to fill, not without a renewal of the apprehension which I felt when I first undertook them. My fear at this time, however, would be far greater than it is but for the remembrance, which I very gratefully cherish, of the judgment which you passed at our annual meeting in May on the attempt which I then made to serve you. I shall best express my sense of the generous character of that judgment by casting myself now on your candour and sympathy, without farther reference to the feelings with which I enter upon the important engagements of this week. I will not even occupy your time with any lengthened expression of the sentiments with which the Congregational churches of this city and neigh-

bourhood welcome your presence. I will limit myself to giving you the assurance that they see you among them with great thankfulness and joy; and that in anticipation of your coming, their desires and prayers have been fervent and multiplied that the public meetings and services, and the private social intercourse of these days, may minister largely to the delight and profit of us all, and to the furtherance of those great public objects for the sake of which chiefly this confederation of our churches exists. I cannot offer you this assurance without calling to mind the absence of one who, had he been with us still, would have been among the foremost to join in those prayers, and to share in the joy with which you are welcomed. We miss him this morning, because the Master of assemblies thought him ripe "for the assembly of the Church which is in heaven." The name of William Day Wills needs no eulogy of mine to accompany the utterance of it. There are few names better known through our churches; none more honoured and loved where it is known. This generation must pass away before the love for him ceases. The generation to come, at least in this city, shall hear of him and honour his name. May it please God to multiply among us the men who, having resources

like his for Christian beneficence, shall resemble him in the humility, and the purity, and the generosity of his spirit!

It will be in your recollection that at our annual meeting in May, I addressed you on the *relation of our public ministry to the prevailing standard of the Christian life.* Having then dwelt on some of the more serious aspects of the Christian minister's responsibility, I have thought there would be a fitness in it, and advantage otherwise, if I now requested your attention to *some thoughts on the Christian parent's responsibility.* It will be felt at once to be a subject fraught with interest, not only to those sustaining the parental relation, but to all the members of an assembly like this, which has at heart, and for its present immediate object, the extension of Christ's Church in the world. For we cannot look into the history of that Church, or recall what has come within our own observation, and not be impressed with its intimate relation to the family, and the extent to which it has been dependent on parental influence for its continued existence and progress. We find that those who have adorned and served it the most in every age have been generally the offspring of its own members, and that of such, indeed, it has usually been mainly composed. In times of

special religious awakenings and reformations, large accessions have been made to it by the conversion of those who had none of the advantages of a Christian parentage and training; and in ordinary times, like our own, it has always been gathering to its bosom by conversion from that class. But in those ordinary times it has mostly renewed its strength and increased its numbers by the adhesion of those who were reared in families more or less closely associated with it.

There is certainly no exception to this furnished by our own churches. The greater number of those who form them, everywhere but in mission spheres, ascribe their Christian profession and character, in a great degree, to early and home influences. But, whilst they consist for the most part of such as have been united to them under those influences, they have been by no means enlarged in this way to the extent that might have been expected. Names, honoured in one generation, are, too often, not repeated among them in the next. We are constantly forbidden to apply to them the words of the promise once given with another reference, "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children." It is matter of common observation and regret, that there should be so large a proportion of the

children of those who constitute them whom they cannot attract, or on whom they fail to retain their hold. The question is being ever asked—and it must necessarily be one of deep concern to this assembly of the representatives of those churches, and still more so to those connected with them who sustain the parental relation—How may this defect in the contribution to their strength and growth from family succession be corrected? *What are the conditions on the fulfilment of which we may calculate with some confidence, that the children of the gdoly among us will maintain the same outward religious associations with their fathers?* It is a question to which we may, perhaps, with some advantage, devote a few remarks.

The primary condition very obviously is, *that they share in the godliness of their fathers.*

Our churches have ordinarily little in them to commend them to the unspiritual. The attraction of worldly distinction belongs only in very exceptional cases to those who compose them. Their places and modes of worship and instruction present little to please the senses and imagination, as compared with those of some other religious communities. They are not only wanting generally in those external elements that would be likely to attract to them purely worldly

minds; but it is to their praise, though apparently to their disadvantage, that, when they are true to their principles, they cannot, in their constitution, and laws, and practices, be otherwise than distasteful to such minds.

In so far as they are spiritual communities, and accord with the Scripture conception of a Church, they can hardly fail to exercise a repelling influence on the unspiritual. The children of the families connected with them cannot be expected to take their parents' place in them, if they do not partake of their faith and repeat their life. Nor is this to be desired. It cannot but afflict the souls of many among us to see that their children will not succeed them in their Church relations, simply because they do not succeed them in their relations to Christ; but they will not say that, without the latter succession, they would desire the former, or would count it anything but an evil to those Christian communities which they love and would serve. It must be one of the great griefs of our churches to see the sons and daughters of the households related to them, growing up in alienation from their communion and services, because they have no share in the character of their parents. It is a reasonable aggravation of this sorrow, when those who thus forsake them

might, by their education, and capacity, and social position, be of special service to them. But they would not, under the circumstances, have it otherwise. It could not minister to their peace, or power, or glory, to hold, in more or less influential connexion with them, the unregenerate children of the godly. A worldly and impure element, these could not remain in close relation to them but as an element of spiritual weakness and corruption. What they might add to their show of strength, by their contribution to their numbers and to their pecuniary resources, would poorly compensate for what they would subtract from their moral power. It may be hard to part with them through the memories and associations that gather round their names; but as they are without the spirit and character of those who gave them those names, it is better they should go. We trust there is little of the will, in such a case, to retain them in our communion. We are sure there is little of the power.

Adequate instruction in the distinctive principles on which our churches are founded, is not less manifestly required to secure their permanent relation to them. They are not only those who do not inherit their parents' godliness that pass away from us to other religious communities, but not

a few who exhibit, in the virtue and devotion of their lives, the fruit of their Christian training. It not unfrequently happens, in the case of these, that they have only a most imperfect acquaintance with the principles on which the churches of their fathers are based; or, when those principles are understood, that they have only a feeble and wavering sense of their truth and importance; so that when they find what they hold to be the essential verities of Christ's gospel, taught in another community than that in which they have been reared, they can see no good reason, on the ground of truth and conscience, for not passing over to it; whilst they see what they feel to be very forcible reasons for doing so, on the ground, it may be, of taste, and yet more often on the ground of social expediency. Care was not taken to educate them in the faith that Christ's truth can righteously and safely depend for its maintenance and diffusion only upon the conviction and love of those who believe in it, and in the faith that Christ's associated people cannot bow to any control over their spiritual thought and action, other than that of the Word of Christ, and of His Spirit within them, without a culpable and injurious surrender of their moral and Christian rights. Is there much care often taken to give

distinctness and prominence to this in our domestic religious instruction? It is surely possible, and not one of the most difficult things, to teach those who are beginning life in our families to understand, and respect, and love this Voluntaryism and this Congregationalism of our churches. They can be explained to them in very simple terms. The evidence for their truth, and the illustration of their worth, can be made intelligible and forcible to their young minds, while the independence and liberty of thought and action which they involve and assert, are not unlikely to commend them to the sympathy of their young hearts. If all this be disregarded, and they are allowed to enter on mature life with no clear understanding of the nature, or definite and settled conviction of the truth, or hearty appreciation of the value, of these our distinctive ecclesiastical principles, we cannot at all wonder that, conscientious and devout though they be, they should be unable, under the circumstances which so often occur to try their attachment to us, to see any sufficient reason for forming and continuing the relations with us which their fathers held.

It is further necessary, if we would look with any well-grounded confidence to their sustaining those relations, *that they should be habituated to*

some forms of Christian work in connexion with the activities of our churches.

It might seem at first, that it would be enough to render most probable their permanent adherence to them that they should be partakers of their piety and be sufficiently instructed in their characteristic principles. It will be found, however, that if their piety and knowledge, and love of those principles, have not the power to constrain them to action for and with our churches, they cannot be relied on for the power to retain them in a life-long relation to them. And we need, for our confidence in the steadfastness of their adherence to us, not only that strength of conviction and affection which will induce action, but the strength of attachment which voluntary and habitual action with us will generally promote. They are the devout and instructed youth who work with us, and only they, of whom we can predict with any assurance of feeling, that they will remain with us. The recruits in our army, who are doing and will do nothing, are likely to forsake us when they find the conflict to become at all threatening or seriously inconvenient to themselves.

Our observation on this point yields distinct and conclusive evidence. Who, among the sons and daughters of our families whose religious

character and intelligent apprehension of our ecclesiastical principles commanded our respect, have we known to forsake us for a more favoured community, when they became practically sensible of some disadvantages under which we laboured? Were they not, in most cases, those who worshipped with us without working with us? Yielding to family influences, and to the force of early associations, and to the attraction, it may be, of some individual ministry, they would regularly and reverently receive our public instruction, and join in our praise and prayer, but they would not commit themselves to the active prosecution of our aims in the interests of truth and righteousness. They would worship with us, but they were not bound to us by a conviction and sentiment strong enough to secure their active co-operation; they would not bind themselves to us by the interest and the habit of a common labour and conflict. On the other hand, have we not found that the devout and instructed, who worked as well as worshipped with us in their youth and dawning manhood, have generally continued their relation and attachment to us? Exceptional instances may be recalled, but this has followed so commonly as clearly to indicate the rule upon the subject.

These are the three conditions, the measure of

conformity to which determines, we think, the reasonableness of our expectation that the children in our families will succeed their parents in our churches. It will probably be said that this succession is, in not a few instances, broken because we fail—sometimes through inability, at other times through indisposition—to adapt our places and forms of worship, and the method and quality of our instruction, to the taste and intelligence of the age. We cannot doubt that we have suffered from this cause. And we would recognise the obligation as of the most serious character, to conform in the provisions and arrangements we make for public worship and instruction, to the demands of the intellectual and æsthetic culture of the day, so far as a just regard to other claims on our resources will enable us, and so far as this can be done consistently with the supremacy of what is spiritual in the services of our religion.

It is not, however, our failure in this respect, to whatever extent it may be truly judged to exist, that will alienate from the communion of our churches any considerable number of those who begin life in connexion with them, if there are fulfilled in them the other conditions we have named. We may, in that case, reasonably hope to retain them, with that correspondence of our

ministry and worship to the cultivated taste and growing intelligence of the times which we are able and willing to furnish. They may then be often and sorely tempted to leave us, and especially for the Church which is dominant in the land through the patronage of the State, and which they see to be more than any other the Church of the affluent, and the powerful, and the cultured, and the fashionable; yet let them become in their early years imbued with the godly spirit of their parents, and well instructed in our ecclesiastical principles, and workers with us in our special aims as Voluntaries and Congregationalists, as well as in our general and higher aims as a Christian people, and we venture to predict, with some confidence, that they will, most of them, resist and overcome the temptation to forsake us in after-life. That threefold cord by which they will be bound to us will not be easily broken.

Interesting and important as the inquiry is, into the conditions on which the children in our churches may be attached by permanent relations to them, there is another inquiry which it has probably suggested to most of us, and which is of far deeper and more solemn significance. It is a great matter with us, taken by itself, that

they should be united throughout life to our own section of the one Church of Christ, but God is our witness that this is a small matter with us, compared with their union to Christ himself.

How may this latter union be effected, in so far as it is dependent on human responsibility? This is the question which, now and always, presses on us with the greatest urgency. *How is that spiritual relation of our children to Christ to be established, without which we have said their permanent relation to our churches is not generally to be expected, and never to be desired?*

The question is no sooner asked, than our thoughts turn to the parental, as, far above every other agency, designed and fitted for that end. Nothing is more readily admitted, at least when it is propounded in general terms, than the great power of parents in the formation of their children's character. Who expects the development and growth of a religious character in those who are reared under the influences of a godless household? Who does not forbode evil to the mind and future life of those who are ever seeing, in the spirit and example of their parents, a perpetual alternation in the dominance of the good and the evil, a vain attempt made to reconcile the service of God and the

world? Who does not hope the best for the principles and career of the children of the house, in which it is not a divided homage that is paid, by those at the head of it, to Christ and duty?

But whilst there is this ready recognition, under general representations of it, of the parent's influence in the determination of the character of his offspring, there is very commonly wanting a distinct and practical belief in that influence, where it is truly religious, as operating with any of the regularity which marks the action of a Divine law. It is regarded, after all, too much as though it depended on the issue of a lottery what course in life those who have received the wisest and most religious training will take. The best is hoped for them, because the chances are much in their favour; not because there is any fixed order or law on the maintenance or operation of which we may build a confident expectation. The children's relation to their parents is often enough compared to that of the streams to their fountain source, and of the branches to the tree out of which they grow; but the streams are pure if the fountain be pure, and the branches are healthy and vigorous if the tree be sound and strong; whilst the child is not, in virtue of a like sequence

from a fixed relation, expected to be virtuous and godly because he has descended from, and been duly trained up under the instruction and guidance of virtuous and godly parents. Now, if there be such an order of sequence, established and maintained by God's all-ruling providence, on the ground of which we may calculate, that when Christian parents put forth the influence of their character and discharge the duties of their relation as they might and should, their children will grow up partakers of their character and blessedness, it is manifestly of the first importance that they should clearly, and fully, and habitually recognise its existence.

Is there such a connexion between the faith and piety of the parent and the faith and piety of the child, that when the former are exercised, so that their just influence shall be felt, we may calculate upon the latter following by the operation of a Divine law? It will serve the main purpose of this address if we inquire into the ground of our belief in that connexion.

It consists partly in the natural ordination whereby new forms of existence are impressed with the character of the immediate sources or instruments of their being.

Everywhere in nature we see the law in operation by which the producing agent com-

municates of its own qualities to that which it produces. The plants of one season impart of their own form, and hue, and fragrance, to those that spring up in after seasons from their seed. Every living thing in the lower animal creation gives of its own nature to its offspring. If, besides the essential qualities of the kind to which it belongs, it has any special attributes of beauty or strength, our experience teaches us to expect that it will transmit these also to those that descend from it.

When we find this law everywhere prevailing by which every living thing in the vegetable and animal world tends to the reproduction, in its offspring, of its own individual qualities, as well as those of its species, we are prepared to find that this law embraces also the relation of the human parent to his offspring. The whole analogy of nature around him would lead us to believe that he, too, would impart of the essential attributes of his being, and also of his individual characteristics to those that may descend from him.

This is what we find when we look at the facts in his case. He communicates of the material, intellectual, and moral elements of his complex nature to his offspring. The only question that may be raised is, whether he communicates of

the moral element, with any modifications of it consequent upon the form and degree in which it exists in himself. Does the law of parental transmission so extend to the communication of moral and religious capabilities and predispositions that the children of the holy and devout obtain any advantages in their primary constitution from the character of their parents? But is there any reason why this should be a question? Can we suppose that any excellence in the physical and intellectual constitution of the parent tends to affect, with a character corresponding to it, the physical and intellectual constitution of the child; but that no excellence in the moral constitution of the parent can have any effect on the nature he communicates to the child, in respect to its moral element and tendency?

Health, and vigour, and beauty of body and of intellect pass from the parent to the child; and can it make no difference to the nature which the child inherits, what may be the health, and vigour, and beauty of its parent's soul? The evil is admitted to be communicable. The sin of the parent brings disorder into the moral constitution of the child. As the evil is in every parent, so the evil tendency is in the nature of every child. Is the law, then, partial and hard?

Does it necessitate that the taint of evil in the parent should impart an evil bias to the nature of the child; and has it no force at all in providing that the holiness wrought by the Divine Spirit into the character of the parent should affect the inherited tendencies of the child's nature?

Who will believe that the Divine law of transmission, as it acts in the moral sphere, is thus one-sided, capricious, all against us? We must conclude that, when nothing interferes with its action, it must operate so as to make a difference to the constitution of a child, in respect to its moral tendencies, whether he be the offspring of depraved or of saintly parents. The parent who is alive to his responsibility will extend his solicitude not only to the education he gives, but to the nature which he communicates to his offspring.

Whatever may be thought (and some may think little) of the advantage which may be derived from the constitutional tendencies inherited from a holy parentage, it is certain that they will avail nothing to the future character and life, apart from the means employed for moral instruction and training. We observe, therefore, that our faith in a connexion between the Christian parent's character and that

of his offspring, through which the latter may be expected to follow from the former, by a fixed order of derivation, *rests further on the means and opportunities given to the parent to form the character of his children after the image of his own.* Moral results are produced on human character according as the means fitted for the production of them are rightly used. Where these are wanting, or neglected, or misapplied, reasonable men do not expect the results, in the improvement of others, which they are adapted to secure. Where they are employed in adequate measure, and with the requisite wisdom of method, and with due respect to time, place, and circumstances, there is found, as a general fact, the effect which corresponds with their nature and this use of them, in those on whom they are brought to bear. But to whom are the means of moral impression on their fellow-men committed, under conditions so favourable to the successful application of them, as to parents in the interests of their children? The Christian minister has chiefly to deal with minds which, through long use, have become slow to receive, quick to lose the impression he would make on them; the parent's action is upon minds that are soft, like wax, to receive impressions, and that are apt to become hard, like marble, to re-

tain them. The minister has but brief seasons, separated by long intervals, in which to effect his purpose in the improvement of those whom he is called to serve; the parent is habitually present with those committed to his care, and is ever acting on their nature. Long before the moral nature of his child is developed, from his earliest infancy, he is, without ceasing, by look, and tone, and deeds innumerable, employing the means which cannot fail to have their influence on the form and direction of its development.

And when the day has arrived for the child to assert the presence of his moral will, and to assume his personal responsibility, he is still, and for years to come, subject to the same guiding and moulding influence. His parent's example is ever before his eyes, and his words are ever falling on his ears, and his life pervades, by its spirit, the sphere in which he moves. Suppose that example, ever before him, to shine with a steady, though faint, reflection of the holy beauty of the Divine example; and those words which he is always hearing, of instruction, and counsel, and warning, spoken to him, and of prayer spoken for him, to be such words as Christian wisdom and solicitude would dictate; and that life, which, more than anything else, creates the moral atmosphere that he is hourly breathing,

to be in some humble but real measure the life of Christ who lives again in his parent. Suppose the Christian parent to avail himself thus of the advantages of his position,—to use, after this manner, those means intrusted to him for the Christian development and growth of his child, should we not expect him to succeed in this, not through any good fortune that has befallen him, but as the result of established relations?

If moral means have, as their name signifies, not an arbitrary relation to their ends, but one based on the nature of things, must we not look for the accomplishment of those ends with more or less confidence according as those means are employed? As the means possessed by Christian parents for the moral and spiritual advancement of their children have in them the greatest possible fitness for that end, and as they have ordinarily the opportunities of using them under the most favourable circumstances possible, we have reason, in the fixed and natural relation of means to ends, for expecting that, when they use faithfully those means and opportunities, they will accomplish their purpose in the conformity of their children's character to their own.

Does not, it may be asked, the quickening and maintenance of the Divine life in man or child

require another influence besides that which follows from natural relations and agencies?

Not, indeed, without the action of the Divine Spirit, will any constitutional tendency imparted by a holy parentage, or any application of the means of moral and religious education, avail for the formation of the Christian character. This comes not "of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man." None become the sons of God by mere natural descent, or by the mere efficacy of any instrumentality that the will and hand of man can employ.

This leads us to observe, in the next place, on what is further included in the ground on which we believe in the connexion between the character of the Christian parent and that of his children, —that *we may calculate with confidence on the communication of the Holy Spirit's grace, when the parental influence is duly exercised.*

God's sovereignty, in the agency of His Spirit, is not exercised irrespective, and therefore to the disparagement, of natural fitness in human instrumentality. There is no arbitrary action in His procedure, through which it matters not whether we use at all, or in what way we use, the means in our power adapted for the attainment of spiritual ends. We learn in all ways from His Word that according as we use those

means, so we may depend on His Spirit's co-operating agency. This is the doctrine which commonly regulates our expectation and practice. We seek the circumstances that are favourable, and employ the means that are, by their own character, adapted for the spiritual improvement of those whose spiritual improvement is our aim, expecting, with such circumstances and means, the Divine co-operation indispensable to our success. The more favourable the circumstances, the greater the fitness of the means we use, and the truer the use we make of them, the more confident is our expectation that the Divine Spirit's presence and power will render them effectual for our purpose. But we have seen that the Christian parent has the power of making the circumstances of his children the most favourable to their character, that he has entrusted to him in largest measure the means most adapted for moral influence. We conclude, then, on the ground of the recognised relation of the Divine agency to the human, that if he faithfully wields the power, and employs the means, at his command, he will not fail in his purpose to raise a godly race to succeed him, through the denial of the co-operation of the Spirit of all grace.

We may thus look for the reappearance in the

offspring of the godly, of the faith and piety of their parents, on the ground of the established order of spiritual as well as natural influences.

This is in *full accordance with the language of Scripture on the subject*,—"I know him," says God of Abraham, "that he will command his children and his household, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." "Thou shalt keep," says Moses to Israel, "His statutes and His commandments, that it may be well with thee, and with thy children after thee." The well-doing and well-being of children are, by such words oft repeated, of promise and command, declared to have a settled dependence upon the instruction and character of their parents. This is no isolated instance of the kind, consequent upon some special favour to Abraham and his race. It is but an example of what is elsewhere affirmed to be a general fact in the relation of families to those at the head of them. Again and again do we read that "God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him, and shows mercy unto thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments," which is the Scripture method of stating that it is according to the law of nature and of Providence for the good and the

bad to determine the moral relations to God of their respective descendants. In another well-known passage of the Old Testament writings, the true moral and religious training of his offspring is urged on the parent on the ground of the sure relation affirmed to exist between this and the course of their after-life, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

We have the same established order of connexion between parental instruction and influence, and the development and growth of character in children, recognised in the Christian Scriptures, where fathers are enjoined "to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." It is taught by the apostle when he says to the believing husband or wife, "Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy." It underlies and explains his reply to the jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." The jailer had expressed no solicitude, asked no question, given no sign of any thought about his house. It was, notwithstanding, immediately associated in the apostle's mind with the belief required as the condition of his own salvation. "Thou shalt be saved and thy house." His faith could contribute to the salvation of his house, only

through that Divine order of sequence by which the faith and character of the parent tend to repeat and perpetuate themselves in his family. That order of sequence explains what is commonly believed in our churches to be the apostolic practice in the baptism of households. It gives, apart from the interpretation we put on the Divine command on the subject, the ground, in reason and expediency, on which most of us administer the rite of baptism to infants. Repudiating, as a pernicious superstition, the doctrine which holds that baptism carries with it a regenerating efficacy, yet holding as we do that established connexion of dependence and derivation between the character of children and that of their parents, we maintain the reasonableness and utility of the Church's recognition of it, by the baptism of the children of those that believe. Those who hold baptism to have altogether another significance, and to rest on quite other grounds, will not on that account the less readily recognise the promise of both Testaments to the godly parent, by which the spiritual welfare of his children is bound up with his own.

Some may hesitate to admit the connexion between parent and child, which we have now represented as partaking of the fixedness of a Divine ordination, on *the ground that it seems to*

preclude the necessity of the personal conversion of every soul that is restored to God. It makes, it may be said, the Christian character of the child to be a development and growth from the character of the parent, and not to date from a time in the child's history when it "forsook its sins, and returned unto the Lord." To which it may be replied that the influence we have ascribed to Christian parentage will ofttimes manifest itself most signally, in the conversion of those who have been subject to it, from the evil ways into which they may have wandered. How frequently have the impressions ineffaceable of childhood's home brought back the prodigal to his father's house! That, however, does not express the first and highest hope of the enlightened Christian parent. He would not, and is not required to bring up his children expecting that they will choose the ways of sin, and that after they have trodden them for a period, long or short, they will, through God's grace following upon his prayer and action, turn to the paths of righteousness. He is permitted, as we have seen, to expect what is far better, that he shall "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," that he shall train them "in the way they should go, so that they shall not depart from it." But whilst he may

hope they will not need to be converted from sinful ways, this does not imply that they do not need the action of the Divine Spirit in the renewal and sanctification of their nature. That action of the Spirit, preventive of their departure into those ways, is presupposed in the hope, when it is well founded, that they will not need to be converted from them.

The necessity for the change which we designate "conversion" in the moral principles and habits of the life of the man, can only be obviated by the experience of the regenerating change in the nature of the child. When we affirm that the character of his children may be expected to follow, in accordance with a Divine ordination, from the character of the Christian parent, it is in every case, whether conversion from developed and predominating ungodliness in their life be required or not, because a change in their fallen nature may be expected to be wrought by the regenerating Spirit, in connexion with the parental relation and influence.

Some may be slow to admit the relation of character between the Christian parent and his child, as we have explained it, *because there seems too little account taken in it of the free action of the human will.* No influence or action, it may be thought, of the parent, for the communication

of his own faith and virtue, can compel the decision of his child. The latter is free to reject the instruction and resist the influence to which he is subject, and he may choose to reject and resist. To which it may be said in answer, that though the freedom of his will cannot be restrained, it does not follow that it is all uncertain how he will use that freedom. We calculate, in other cases, on the future course men will take, though we know it will depend on the free action of their own will. In the circumstances in which we see they will be placed, with the influence that we see will act upon them, we are sure, notwithstanding our sense of the mystery that attaches to their will, what their choice and course will be. So in the case before us, we do not overlook the moral freedom of the children of the godly—how it will rest with themselves to choose what shall be the principles and ends of their life; we disclaim the notion of any force operating on them like that which enters into our conception of physical causation; we do not say what they must do; we only say that we have good reason for calculating with confidence on what they will do,—that, born and reared in Christian homes, partaking of all the advantages which should attend such a birth and training, we may calculate with a confidence of the kind

inspired by known and established relations between antecedents and consequences, how they will exercise their mysterious freedom of will in the choice they will make, and which will fix their character and destiny.

But the objection to this which will occur to most, and will be felt as of most weight, is, *that it wants the confirmation of experience.* Look, we may be told, into our churches, and see how many are born in connexion with them who never acquire the moral qualifications necessary for a place in them; mark how frequently in our households the religious character deteriorates as you pass downward from parent to child; consider the number who quite forsake the Christian ways in which their fathers trod. Are not the facts within our observation against the admission of a Divine law, on the ground of which we may expect the Christian character of the parent to be reproduced in his offspring?

They are not against it, excepting in appearance and at first thought. The law operates only as the parent avails himself of it, adjusts himself to the conditions of its operation, puts forth the influence of the Christian character, and employs the other means and influences entrusted to him in the interests of his children. And do we not see evidence of the existence and

action of that law, up to the measure that the conditions of its operation are fulfilled, in the spirit and life of the children generally of the professedly Christian? Are they not, taken now altogether, such as we should have expected them to be, considering what the parental character and action have been? Do not the children generally of our churches grow up as virtuous and religious as we could have anticipated from the light and life in those churches? Could we, with our knowledge of what the generation is that is passing away, have reasonably looked for anything better or different in the generation that is just appearing? Are not these the branches that we should have expected those trees would, as by a natural law, have sent forth? If those who come forth from our Christian households to the duties and responsibilities of life, were animated by a much holier and nobler spirit than that which we see to move them—if they were devoted to more spiritual and far loftier ends than those which we see them pursue, we might call into question the existence of the law by which the parent imparts of his character to his child; but, being what they are in spirit and aim, we see the evidence of its existence, and a general example of its operation.

It may, however, be further urged, that while that moral accordance between the children of our Christian homes, and those from whom they spring, must be admitted as a general fact, the exceptions are so numerous, and of such a kind, as to make it doubtful whether there be a Divine order of sequence established, from which, in the particular instances in which we may be specially concerned, we could expect it to follow. Are not the immediate descendants of those in high reputation for eminent godliness, too often conspicuous by the contrast which their own reputation presents? Does not the tree that is deemed the best often yield the worst fruit? How, in the face of such examples, can it be maintained that there is a law of nature and of the Spirit, on the ground of which we may look for the repetition of the Christian parent's character and life in his offspring?

The difficulty which those examples present is more apparent than real, and generally disappears on a little inquiry. Some one or more of the conditions on which that law manifests itself are commonly found to have been disregarded. The piety, in those instances, of the parents, which commanded general attention, and which became the more noticeable from the contrast in the ungodliness of the children,

is discovered, on inquiry, to have shone with a light far less pure and bright at home than before the eyes of the world; or their benevolence, which was active in its care and large in its expenditure for public objects, is found to have been not so much concerned to meet with discrimination the separate and distinctive necessities and claims of those souls which were preparing for the duties and trials of life in the privacy of their own dwellings; or, if there was an equal expression of their Christian principles and affections in the narrower sphere, an intimate acquaintance with their home-life reveals that want of wise thought which is often not less evil in the penalty it incurs than the want of Christian integrity. They were too indulgent to the inclinations of those committed to their charge, or they were severe in what they imposed and exacted. Or in their religious instruction there was too much to excite dread of God, too little to inspire confidence in Him; duty was too much and too long enforced as obedience to law, not sufficiently and chiefly as the service of love; or in the example of their own experience and life, religion, which should have been bright and joyous, shedding heaven's light and influence on the house, wore too commonly an aspect of fear and sadness, discouraging and repellant

to the instincts and affections of the young. With the fuller knowledge of their home-life it has, far oftener than not, ceased to be at all strange and mysterious that their children did not share in their faith and walk in their ways. It has been seen, not that there was reason to doubt the reality of the law of moral connexion, but that they had clearly failed to conform to some of the conditions on which it acts.

Instances may occur to which this explanation will not apply. It will be said that where the character, as it revealed itself at home, has been felt to be worthy of the homage paid to its piety and benevolence abroad, and where the parental authority and influence have been exercised with as much wisdom as the imperfection that must attach to all that is human would warrant us to expect, even there, through some peculiar and inexplicable defect of organisation or special counteracting force of external circumstances, the most cherished hope of the parent has been disappointed, and the most anxious, and yet most loved labour of his life has been lost. We do not deny the reality of such instances. We have no doubt, however, that a thorough inquiry, if it were in all cases possible, would prove them to be of far rarer occurrence than is generally believed. But, admitting that

they occur, it does not invalidate the force of the evidence for the existence of the law, in virtue of which the Christian parent, rightly using the advantages of his position, may expect his seed to partake of his faith and character.

All through nature we meet with exceptional results which disappoint the expectations formed in dependence on the natural ordinances given for the guidance of our action. We do not for that reason question the existence of those ordinances, or cease to calculate on their presence and operation. The husbandman may choose the field most fitted to produce the fruit that he desires; he may cultivate it with all care; he may sow the good seed with due regard to season and circumstances; and yet, through the intervention of an agency not subject to his control, his labour may all be lost; but he does not, therefore, doubt whether there be the established relation, involved in a natural law, between his labour at seed-time, and his ingathering of the fruit at harvest-time. He is as convinced of it as he was before that exceptional failure and loss; and when the sowing season comes again, and all through his life as it returns, he will act on his conviction, and expect with confidence (and not expect in vain) that

the result will be in accordance with the Divine ordinance.

Not any more in the moral field allotted to the care of the parent, should any exceptional instances, apparent or real, of barren results following the faithful and wise performance of his labour, shake his conviction in the divinely-established relation between the labour thus performed, and the production and ripening of that fruit which he longs to gather.

He should expect his field—when he thinks he has bestowed on it the labour which is required of him, and which must be possible to him,—to become fruitful through the action of the Divine law. If it should disappoint him, and only thorns and briers grow in it, his first thought should be, not that there may be no such law on which he had a right to calculate, but that he was most likely mistaken when he thought he had conformed to it. To doubt its existence because there may be occasions on which its presence cannot be discovered, is as unreasonable as it would be, if he who cultivates the natural soil doubted, because he had known unfruitful seasons, whether there was any fixed order of connexion upon which he could rely between his work at seed-time and his reward at the harvest.

It is necessary to the husbandman that he should believe in that connexion. It is not less necessary that those whom God has entrusted with the care of their children's souls should believe that when they shall have discharged the obligations of that trust,—as with God's help they may,—there is a Divine ordinance which connects what they have been and done with the effects they desire in their children's character and condition.

Without that faith, they will not apply themselves to their greatest work on earth, with a fitting sense of the weight of responsibility which they have to bear.—Without that faith, but having in the place of it the feeling, that, let them be and do what they may, it is all uncertain what their children may become and do, they will, if these should disappoint them in departing from God, be apt to spend the time in reflecting on the instability of human hopes and the perversity and strength of the evil in man's nature, which should be spent in seriously inquiring wherein they have failed in their parental relations, to be mourning their family trials when they should most likely be confessing their sins and supplicating God's forgiveness.—Without that faith, they will be without the inspiration and strength which they need, in their

thoughtful moments, to endure the burden of spiritual care laid upon them. A heavy burden is that care of the souls committed to their guidance, and protection, and influence. And they may well feel the weight of it to be intolerable if they should think that there is no relation, definite and fixed, on which they can confidently depend, between the best which they may do for those souls and their future and eternal well-being,—that they must live and labour for them, hoping, amid fears, from the chances which are in their favour, not resting on a Divine law which is on their side. The burden is lightened and they are able to bear it when they put their faith in that law. A greater faith in it than is common among us, is what we would urge as one of the principal wants of those whom God has exalted to this high office of training up their children for His service and blessedness.

As they trust to what they recognise as the ordinance of God in the material world, so let them trust to what is proved to be His ordinance in the moral world. As they cultivate their plants and flowers with the confident expectation that they will live, and thrive, and blossom through the faithfulness of God to the law on which this depends; so let them care for

the souls placed in their charge and under their culture, calmly and confidently expecting these also will live, and thrive, and become beautiful and fragrant, because God will abide by the law which He has established in relation to them. Let them live and work, having faith in the law of the house not less than in the law of the garden. Let them be sure that the Divine ordinance according to which plants and flowers grow under their hands, is not more sacredly observed on God's side than the ordinance on which depends the growth of the souls given them to train.

It will have occurred to most to think of the hindrances, which lie in the parent's path, when he would be good and wise up to the measure of fulfilling the conditions on which the promise and ordinance of God become operative in favour of his children. If he could be and do what is required of him, then he might look with confidence for the results which he desires in their character; but how much is there against him when he would make this his aim and endeavour! It is easy for him to conform to the law of life and growth which rules in the field and the garden; hard to conform to that law in the family which regulates the moral life and growth of those who are born into it.

What vigilance, and care, and labour, in the conflict with hostile influences does it involve! There is no end to the words of counsel, and warning, and argument, which are suggested as we look on this side of the subject.

Let me refer to some of the things, adverse in their influence, on which the parent should fix his watchful eye, and against which he should direct his earnest endeavours, if he would see his children grow up in the faith and obedience of Christ.

1. I am disposed to give prominence among these to *the sentiment which has been common to every age, and which assigns a greater sanctity and spiritual power to the Christian church than to the Christian family.* It is in man's nature to seek for himself a vicarious religion. The Romish Church provides for the gratification, in this as in so many other respects, of his desire. It takes charge of his soul. It professes to have at its disposal, and for him if he submits to it, the regenerating grace of the Spirit, the very body of Christ, the power of absolution from guilt. Believing in its professions, his first and well-nigh his only religious care for himself will have respect to the relation in which he stands to it. And if he be a parent, his highest duty to his children will, he thinks, be performed when he

has placed them in the prescribed relation to it. Has he not done what is best for them, and all that is indispensable on his part for their safety, when he has delivered them up to the spiritual charge of the Holy Mother, to whom he has committed the care of his own soul?

There are Protestant churches, as we all know, who claim for themselves the power to do, by their observances and teaching, for the children that are brought to them, a service far higher in kind, as well as in degree, than is possible for their parents by any endeavour, or under any circumstances, to do for them, and who thereby contribute in no small degree to impair the sense of parental responsibility. We repudiate for ourselves, at least in our church theory and principles, all claim to such power; still, seeing that it is made so widely, and that it meets the desire, so strong in our nature, to escape responsibility, especially in matters of religion, we cannot be surprised that there should be not unfrequently with us also a practical acknowledgment of it. Does not the parent among us too often look upon the meeting-place of his church as more holy than the place of his abode, the assembly in that public place as more sacred than the smaller gathering around his own hearth, the instruction and worship in the great congre-

gation, the rites and observances practised in it, as more solemn and impressive, and more efficacious for spiritual ends, through the fuller measure of the Divine presence and power in them, than any instruction, or service, or action, can be expected to be in the little family circle? And thus exalting the church above the family, as a sphere of Divine influence, he is apt to think that he discharges the chief part of his obligation to the souls of his children, when he brings them under its instruction and influence. Does he not, he will say to himself, render them the highest service in his power,—does he not provide for them the truest moral and religious training, when he is so careful to take them to the holiest place—the very house of God,—where they witness the most sacred observances, and receive the fullest and most powerful instruction, and are most in the presence of the Divine Spirit? Is not his duty largely done, when he has brought them under the educating influences of his church?

He need be warned against this narrow view of his obligation, and of the false estimate on which it rests, of the moral power of the church as compared with his own. There is a sense, indeed, in which the education of the children in connexion with it, is the work of the church,

but it is so for the most part only as it acts upon them through their parents. These represent the church to the children. These are most of all the church to them. Through these it chiefly speaks to them, and prays for them, and labours for them. It is little, without the co-operation of their parents, and apart from them as the medium of its communication, that it can hope to accomplish for them. How much can it avail to their spiritual life and health that they breathe a pure air in the public assemblies of the church, if they breathe daily and hourly quite a different atmosphere at home? What can be expected from the impressions they receive through the instruction of their teacher or minister, if they see and hear nothing to confirm them in their home-life, which is nearly their whole life? Is it not very much left to their parents to determine whether or not those impressions shall become permanent as principles? Is it not easily in their power, by their talk and life in the house, quickly to efface them? They should know that it is the smallest portion of their responsibility they have discharged when they have brought those who are born to them under the influence of the church as it acts outside their own doors, seeing that it still mostly rests with them whether that

influence shall be effective or impotent for good; and know, too, how much further their responsibility reaches than to the performance of all that bears directly on the efficaciousness of the outward influence of the church, for that they have a power independent of its organisation and collective action, and greater than belongs to it. They need know, and be deeply and abidingly sensible, that there are no walls which are hallowed by a diviner consecration than those within which they dwell,—no functions more sacred than those assigned to them, whom God by His providence has ordained to be prophets, and priests, and kings within their own house,—no words spoken by human lips so fitted to be "the power of God unto salvation" as those which should fall from their lips on the ears of their children,—no priestly hands so likely, by any rites and observances, to convey the Holy Ghost as their hands by the daily work they may do on the behalf and in the presence of their children,—no ministers who can do for the souls in their congregations what they may do for those souls in their families,—no church that has the power for religiously educating like the church in the house.

2. An error against which they need not less to guard is that which would make their spiritual

service to their children mainly depend on *their conscious and direct efforts for their good; only in a subordinate degree on the unconscious and undesigned influence of the spirit of their life.*

It is a more common error in these days of philanthropic activities than in the times of our forefathers. Active benevolence is now valued far above contemplative piety. He is the very useful man in the popular judgment, who is always planning, or executing by gift or labour, some merciful purpose. And his usefulness is determined by what he does; only in a slight degree by what he is. The work counts for more than the man. It is forgotten how much the work that is done for spiritual ends depends on the spirit of the worker, and forgotten, too, how much that spirit of the worker, as expressed in his habitual life, can accomplish, irrespective of all work he does with a benevolent aim. This is forgotten in our domestic relations, where it most needs to be remembered. Does not the parent often think much more of the influence which he puts forth by what he does occasionally or frequently, with a conscious purpose in the spiritual interests of his children, than of that which is unconsciously exercised by his entire life in the house?

He speaks to them of their souls; he instructs,

and counsels, and warns, and reproves; he performs acts of worship in their presence, and offers prayer on their behalf; he gives directions and rules to which they must conform. And he will look on this varied action, designed for their spiritual welfare, as including the greater part of what is obligatory on him in relation to it, and as carrying with it the highest influence for its accomplishment. He makes thus their spiritual improvement the care of a separate department of his life, into which he enters when he thinks of their claims and necessities—not the work which is to be done by the action of his life in all its departments, and when he has no thought of them, not less than when it is his purpose to serve them. It is in vain, however, that he expects much from the efforts which he intends for their good, if they have no moral force in them, derived from the influence of his habitual life. The influence of that life is required, too, apart from those efforts, and, duly put forth, will be found to be far greater than theirs. The efforts which are intended, and made directly for the children's welfare, will often provoke resistance, when the light and power in the parent's life, of which they are merely observers, will win their approval and submission. Those efforts can only be made

on occasions; his life is a constant presence and power. It is himself, more than his work for them, that will impress their nature and determine their course. It is the abiding spirit of his life that will minister effectually to the nourishment and growth of their souls. "Your character," says the American writer, Bushnell, addressing himself to parents, "is a stream, a river flowing down upon your children, hour by hour; what you do here and there to carry an opposing influence, is at best only a ripple that you make on the surface of the stream. It reveals the sweep of the current—nothing more. If you expect your children to go with the ripple, instead of the stream, you will be disappointed."

Those among us who feel that they are under obligations to a Christian parentage, greater than they can express, and that will last for ever, will bear witness that the power which chiefly wrought upon them was that of the principle and spirit of the whole life, with which they were so familiar during their early and impressible years; and that now, when memory repeats the blessing then first received, it is not so much by recalling particular acts of spiritual care and service, as by recalling the image of the life itself of the sainted father or mother, which never returns but like an angel presence and guardian.

In this, as in other ways, does the witness of our experience enforce the apostolic words first addressed to a minister in a church, but not less applicable to God's minister at the head of the family, and never more seasonably addressed to him than now, when active and designed beneficence is made the great test of usefulness, —"Take heed to thyself, and to thy doctrine." He should lay it to heart, (as should every man who would do the highest service to those whom he loves; but he, most of all, because of the unceasing and all-pervading influence of his character in the house,) that his first and supreme care should be himself—that far more will follow from what he is than from what he does—that holiness is before beneficence—that it is a much greater thing to be good than to do good—that he is most sure of doing good, and the most good, by being good.

3. The temptation, which in our day has become more than ordinarily strong, *to seek the temporal advantage, to the neglect, and even more directly at the expense, of the spiritual well-being of his children*, is one which demands his utmost vigilance and care.

It is his natural desire, and, in most cases, his duty, as God's providence may give him the power, to enlarge their means of present enjoy-

ment and improve their social condition. It has always been one of his temptations to make this his chief care for them. Of late years, the facilities for accomplishing this have greatly increased. Formerly the social condition of men would remain substantially the same for generations; whereas now, he who yesterday laboured with his hands for his bread, is to-day the large employer of the labour of others. Those whom we remember as having a bare competency, or none of this world's goods, are enjoying the luxuries and shining with the splendours of wealth. The distinctions of social life are won by the children of the obscure. With this unprecedented facility to rise, the desire for it has become intensified. In the homes especially of those who form the middle class in society, it has become too often the ruling passion. How many a father's and a mother's heart in our congregations is possessed by it! How many among us have, in consequence of this, fallen by the power of the temptation to seek the worldly and temporal before the spiritual and eternal welfare of their children! Who has not known the father to be busy in the world, in the pursuit of gain with which to enrich his children, when he would have been at home, ministering of God's truth and grace to them, had he cared as

much for their souls as he cared for their circumstances! Who has not known him, not of necessity, but from choice, so multiply his business cares and pursuits for the aggrandisement of his house, that these made such a demand on his time, and thought, and practical energies, as to leave him, if any, only the scantiest leisure and power to advance the godliness of his sons and daughters? Have we not seen the parents' choice of their children's school, of their place of residence, of their place of worship, of their business or profession, to be determined by a paramount regard to their social position and general prospects in this life? When circumstances have prepared the way for the friendly and intimate intercourse of their children with some neighbouring family, distinguished by its Christian virtues, but socially a degree, or half a degree, lower than themselves in the conventional scale, have we not known the father, and the mother too, stern in their discountenance of that intercourse, because it was possible it might lower, by that degree, or that half or indefinable portion of a degree, the social position of their children? And, when circumstances have opened the way for a like intercourse with some neighbouring house, which was far more worldly than spiritual, but which would be deemed rather higher than

themselves in the social scale, have we not then known the parents both, to encourage the intercourse, though it was more than possible it might lower their children's position in that other scale which gave the distance of their souls from God?

When the affections of their child would lead to the life-long union with one of unquestioned and superior piety, but of inferior worldly condition, have we not seen them inexorable in their prohibition; and then, when the love of the child would point to a marriage alliance with one, if not of doubtful morality, of doubtful religious character, but of superior means and station, have we not observed the faint or seeming hesitation to give way? The character that was questioned was judged of with great charity. The favourable points had justice done to them, and more than justice. The doubtful became hopeful. They were inexorable only when the social position and worldly prospects of their child were concerned; they would listen and yield, and were willing to run not a little risk, when it was only the soul of their child that was imperilled.

In other ways, which will readily suggest themselves, do men fail before the temptation, so common and strong in these days, to neglect the

spiritual, in their care for the worldly, interests of their families. Would that all who are exposed to this trial (and how few of those who have the charge of families are not exposed to it!) would oftener withdraw into the conscious presence of God, and of their own conscience, and would there think—what it is they profess to believe concerning their children's spiritual and immortal natures, and the awful possibilities of good and evil before them in this and in the eternal world—how mistaken and guilty is their love to them when they subordinate their spiritual to their temporal well-being,—how, in this way, doing, according to the worldly phrase, "the best for their children," they are, in deed and in truth, doing their worst for them!

What matters it, that in that field given them to cultivate and make fruitful, there is a Divine law, through the operation of which they might reap the fruit of righteousness and godliness in the character of their children. They can only expect to do so when they conform to that law by cultivating the soil with a view to that fruit, and sowing the seed that yields it. If it be the fruit of worldly respectability and possession they most desire in the lives of their children, and they sow the seed of it, and labour on the soil with a supreme regard to it, it is not for

of real concern to the Christian parent, to find that the attention and interest of his children are habitually engrossed in the perusal mainly of books which have no tendency to quicken and nourish within them the higher and Divine life.

But the evil influence of that devotion to them takes a positive form. They deal with unreal persons and things. The best of them may do this without violating the probabilities of actual life. But the bulk of them occupy their reader with scenes and events and characters far removed from the realities of his daily existence. Must not that frequent absorption of his thoughts and feeling in the creations of an unreal world, indispose and tend to incapacitate him for the moral and religious duties of his daily life among the obstinate facts and common and monotonous scenes of this real world?

Works of fiction derive their principal charm from their power to excite. We are made susceptible, however, of the excitement of feeling not only for the momentary gratification which it yields it, but also and chiefly for the impulse and strength it gives for right action. When the excitement, as in this case, is ever sought and indulged in for its own sake, and ends in

the mere luxury of enjoyment, there is a waste of that energy of feeling which might have greatly served the highest purposes in the character and life.

And the waste of power in the stimulated feeling is not the only thing to be deplored. Stimulants may be necessary at times, but the soul cannot, any more than the body, live and thrive upon them. Taken as its food, as they are in this instance, they must vitiate its tastes and appetites, impair its health, and endanger its true life.

Is not, too, the moral tone of a large proportion of the most popular novels unfavourable to that earnest piety which godly parents desire for their children? Even in their inculcation of virtue, and in the embodiment of virtue in the characters which are intended to be the beauty and glory of their pages, is it not generally the case that the virtue is of that kind which is divorced from godliness, and that the characters which challenge and win the admiration and love of the reader are absolutely independent, for the origin and maintenance of their beauty and nobleness, of any faith in Christ or fellowship with God? And must not the frequent and absorbing contemplation and admiration of a virtue that has no foundation or support in

religious faith and habits, or acknowledged relation to them, tend to lower the estimate of their worth and indispose to the cultivation of them? The late Robert Hall declared that it took him weeks to recover from the effects of the eager perusal, at one time, of volume after volume of moral tales, popular in his day, and that were characterised by their delineation of such a virtue. If a mind like his must needs suffer so much spiritual detriment when exposed to that influence, how sure and potent for evil must be its action on the susceptible and undisciplined minds of the younger members of our families!

We might add, if it were necessary, to these reasons for deprecating the devotion to works of fiction too common in these days. We have the weightiest testimony to the evil that follows from it. "I do not know," writes Dr Arnold, whose judgment on the subject carries with it a weight scarcely equalled, certainly not exceeded, by that of any other man, "to what to ascribe the childishness in boys, which seems to be a growing fault, except it be to the great number of exciting books of amusement;" and he then specifies some of the most popular among them. Speaking elsewhere of the prevailing, and, as he thought, increasing, want of Christian thoughtfulness among boys, he says, "One cause I do

find, which is certainly capable of producing such a result,—a cause undoubtedly in existence now, and as certainly not in existence a few years back, nor can I trace any other besides this which appears likely to have produced the same effect. This cause consists in the number, and character, and cheapness, and peculiar mode of publication of the works of amusement of the present day. In all these respects the change is great and extremely recent. The works of amusement published only a few years ago were comparatively few in number; they were less exciting, and, therefore, less attractive; they were dearer, and, therefore, less accessible; and, not being published periodically, they did not occupy the mind for so long a time, nor keep alive so constant an expectation; nor by thus dwelling upon the mind, and distilling themselves into it, as it were, drop by drop, did they possess it so largely, colouring even in many instances its very language, and affording frequent matter for conversation. The evil of all these circumstances is actually enormous."

What has been the result of our own observation? Has it not been to this effect—that those of our youth who sought in the novel chiefly or largely for their mental aliment and pleasure, cared little or nothing for the perusal of God's Book, found

least satisfaction in the solemnities of ordinary worship, took the least part and interest in the activities of Christian benevolence, and gave the least promise of a real and earnest Christian life?

He who would prepare his children for that life need, if much of their time and attention be occupied with books, exercise a watchful care, so that these may be for the most part of a kind to exert upon them another influence than that we have now described. He will not, if he is wise, often make his authority in the matter felt by formal sanctions and prohibitions; but he will, by his example, and counsel, and the use of such influence as reverence and love for him will ensure, seek that what they chiefly read shall minister to their mental and moral health and life. It will be among his first cares for his children's sake, if not for his own, that his house be furnished with the Christian literature best adapted for that end. He will watch over their intercourse in books with those of stronger minds than their own, and who have communicated their spirit and principles into their writings, with a solicitude like that with which he would regard their living and personal intercourse with them. To a great extent he will apply to the choice of their books, so far as this depends upon him, the rule which regulates

his action in relation to the choice of their companions.

5. *The social entertainments which enter now more largely than ever into the family life may also well occupy his most serious thought.* They serve to indicate the moral spirit that predominates in the house, and they confirm the predominance of that spirit of which they are the signs. The children in the house are especially subject to their influence. They are widely different now from what they used to be, at least in the more cultivated religious households. Our fathers were accustomed to draw a broad line of distinction between the church and the world, when they judged of the scenes and enjoyments that were right and seemly at the social gatherings of Christian people. It is probable that the line which they drew was too broad; it is more than probable that the line which is now drawn is too narrow. Is it not too often a line that is hardly perceptible? Have not the words "worldly conformity," as applied in this connexion, been lost to the vocabulary of many a Christian circle, and the evil which they were supposed to describe nearly, if not quite, ceased to be recognised? Do not many who bear the name of Christ judge with little or no inquiry that it must be generally right and safe,

in the means and modes of their social recreations, to follow the prevailing example of their neighbourhood? But is English society so pervaded by the spirit of Christ that His followers may safely in this matter accept its judgment and conform to its example? Is there not still existing "the world," which is antagonistic as of old to "the Church?" Should the world give the law to the Church? It is not too much to require, before the Christian man submits to the guidance of the popular example in the social habits and enjoyments of his house, that he should be sure that there is nothing in what he does contrary in its own nature to the law of Christ, and also nothing in its necessary tendency, or in the circumstances inseparable from it, injurious to the life and health of the soul. Are there not social customs and entertainments, directly against which not one of the moral precepts could be quoted, but which not the less offend the spiritual taste, and, therefore, hinder the formation of it, or impair it when it is formed, and which diminish the intimacy and frequency of the soul's communion with God where they do not wholly forbid it? Those customs and entertainments which reason and experience declare to be detrimental to the spiritual feeling and to the habit of devotion,

the enlightened parent who has an earnest care for the spiritual well-being of his children will discountenance just as though he found them separately named and branded among the Divine prohibitions.

It may be thought and objected (though, we trust, by none present) that we are vainly pleading for the strictness and rigour of Puritanical principles and manners in the intercourse and recreations of social life. We are not pleading for what is Puritanical, if by that be meant anything that would subtract from the real joy or beauty of Christian homes. Let our dwellings be as beautiful and pleasant as we have the means of making them; let there be luxuries on our tables, if our resources are abundant; let us welcome and enter into the joy of the festive seasons; let our walls ring with the sound of laughter; let us make merry and be glad with our children and friends. No homes or social meetings should be more joyous than those which are favoured by the all-consecrating presence of Christ.

But if it be Puritanical to avoid and condemn the social gatherings and entertainments in which the arrangements and personal associations forbid all intercourse that could profit the understanding or the heart, and all enjoyment but that

of which the worldliest and vainest and most frivolous can partake,—in which there is an expenditure exceeding what the moderate love of luxuries would necessitate, a wasteful expenditure which would not be made but for the ostentation of wealth or the ostentation of hospitality,—in which the mirth, excited by the stimulant that acts through the eye, and the ear, and the mouth, often degenerates into what is akin to revelling, —in which the demand made on the last hours of the night, and not seldom on the first hours of the morning, leave no time for the worship of God in the family, or in the closet, supposing the spirit of worship be not for the time quite extinguished; if it be Puritanical to condemn these, —may our churches long continue to be Puritanical in their condemnation. If they have lost to any extent this Puritanism, may it be quickly and fully restored. The families which find one of the chief, and necessary, and frequent enjoyments of their winter evenings, in such entertainments, are hardly fitted for nurseries to Christ's Church. The children reared in them are not the hope of that Church. Are they not commonly lost to it? Is it not the fact, as we might have expected it would be, that they grow up with little or no taste for spiritual services and pleasures, and that they look for the social joys of their mature life

in another friendship and communion than those of Christ and His people?

I have said more than enough to impress some with a painful and disheartening sense of the greatness of their responsibility and of the labour required of them in the discharge of it. They need not, however, be discouraged, and must not complain. Great responsibility means great power, which is ever an object of ambition, and is especially prized when, as in the present instance, it is great power to serve those we most love. Great labour is willingly performed in their service. When we see how men will strain every faculty and exhaust every energy, deny themselves, and suffer, and wear out prematurely their life on earth in enriching their children with this world's goods, it is not for Christian parents to complain or object that they must strive, and toil, and suffer, and make much sacrifice if they would enrich their children with the imperishable substance.—Great responsibility and labour mean also great honour bestowed on them. The more we have to answer for, the more we are exalted. The more arduous our task, the more God has distinguished us. We are honoured more by the great work we have to do, than by the great gift we receive. It should be remembered, too, that if the

sponsibility and labour are great, so is their reward rich and glorious. How are they who have trained up their children to a virtuous and godly life repaid for all it cost, in the knowledge that they have of the service they have rendered to them, and through them to God and the world! What deeper satisfaction could they desire in the declining years of their life than that which this knowledge yields them! How poor, at their life's close, would be any hope of posthumous fame compared with their confident expectation that they shall not wholly pass away when they die, but live on for long years to come in that moral and spiritual life they have communicated to their descendants! And when the better world is reached, how must they rejoice to know that these are doing God's will in this lower world, and will soon join them there! What must be the blessedness of their reunion and heavenly communion with them! That reunion with those whom they have left behind in their earthly homes seems to us at present as though it were a necessity of their happiness. It is among the things we cannot explain how they could be happy in heaven itself, if they knew that one or more of those to whom they gave being on earth, and on whom they lavished their strongest and tenderest love, could never join

them in that world. If they could believe that those who were missing and were never to be found by them again, had passed away from existence, we could comprehend how the time might come when they would be reconciled to their absence, but with the knowledge, which according to the common belief of Christians they must have, of their continued existence, and in a world so unlike their own—a world condemned, and suffering under the Divine retribution—we cannot understand how they could rest and be happy. Still less can we understand it, if we suppose them conscious that those lost to them had suffered in their character through their neglect of them in the early and critical period of their earthly existence. It is, upon that supposition, and with only what we now know of the law of human affections, inconceivable how they could forgive themselves through all eternity and be wholly blest. It is among the things to be revealed. But we can well understand now how it will be one of their chief felicities, the joy of joys, the crown of their rejoicing, a joy unspeakable and everlasting, to have as the reward of their care and labour those given to them on earth and whom they had loved as they loved their own souls, all given to them again in heaven and for

eternity.—It should be remembered, too, when they are faint-hearted and ready to complain, that if their responsibility and work be great, so also is the help, in co-operating agencies, which God has provided for them. The promise of God, as we have seen, is to them and their children. When they do as He has ordinarily given them the power of doing, the law of God, of which that promise is the declaration, and which regulates natural and spiritual influences, is on their side. The Spirit of God is on their side. The Church of God is on their side. It is not for them to be faint and weary, far less to complain. They may well take courage and rejoice in the very greatness of their trust and work. They that are for them are more than they that are against them.

I have just referred to the help provided for them in the co-operation of the Church. The reference suggests many a question concerning the extent to which we, as a portion of that Church, furnish the help to which the parents among us have a claim. Can we, when we meet on these great occasions, partly to take account of our resources, and of the uses to which we apply them, sum up, and then dwell with complacency on the whole amount of what we have done in the encouragement of Christian schools

for the children of the working and middle classes respectively? Can we look with satisfaction on the more directly spiritual action of our churches as auxiliaries to the parents among them?

There is one man in every congregation, whose power over the children connected with it is usually second only to that of their parents. Is the minister always or sufficiently mindful of his power? Does he make it appear by his instructions and example, and by his spirit, and speech, and practice in the households to which he has free access, and where he is always welcome, that he does not forget how greatly he may help the parent? Does he think of the ways in which it is possible and easy for him to hinder him?

There is one family in most congregations whose moral power for good or evil is usually greater than that of any other in them. It is the minister's family. Does he show his sense of this by his care for his own house? Does he reckon, as he should, that the claims of his own children's souls upon him are before the claims of his church, and of all the churches, and of all the world? Does he act as though he thought and felt that no work he does abroad can compensate or excuse any neglect of the work at

home? Is the work at home so done by him, the "ensample to the flock," that he may reasonably expect that his children too will be "ensamples" to the young of his flock?

They are questions which we cannot escape when we would refer the parent to the help which he should seek and find in the Church. May we deal with enlightened and tender consciences with these and all questions bearing on our duties and responsibilities which shall occupy us during these days!

May the Great Spirit for whom so much supplication has been made, come! May our meetings and services be all holy and happy through His presence! May they be memorable in the history of the Congregational churches of this land! There will be a long and vivid remembrance of them in our churches in this city. May the memory of them be always fragrant! May the churches of Christ who have sought the presence among them of Christ's servants, have always the joy of the remembrance that the Master also came! May the families that entertain them rejoice to recognise in the servants the spirit and image of their Lord! May many a child in those families call to mind in distant years how, in the autumn of 1865, there came to his father's house men of God who added for the

time to the brightness and gladness of his home, and who left behind them an impression of reverence and love for their Master, which long remained, if it was ever quite lost!

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